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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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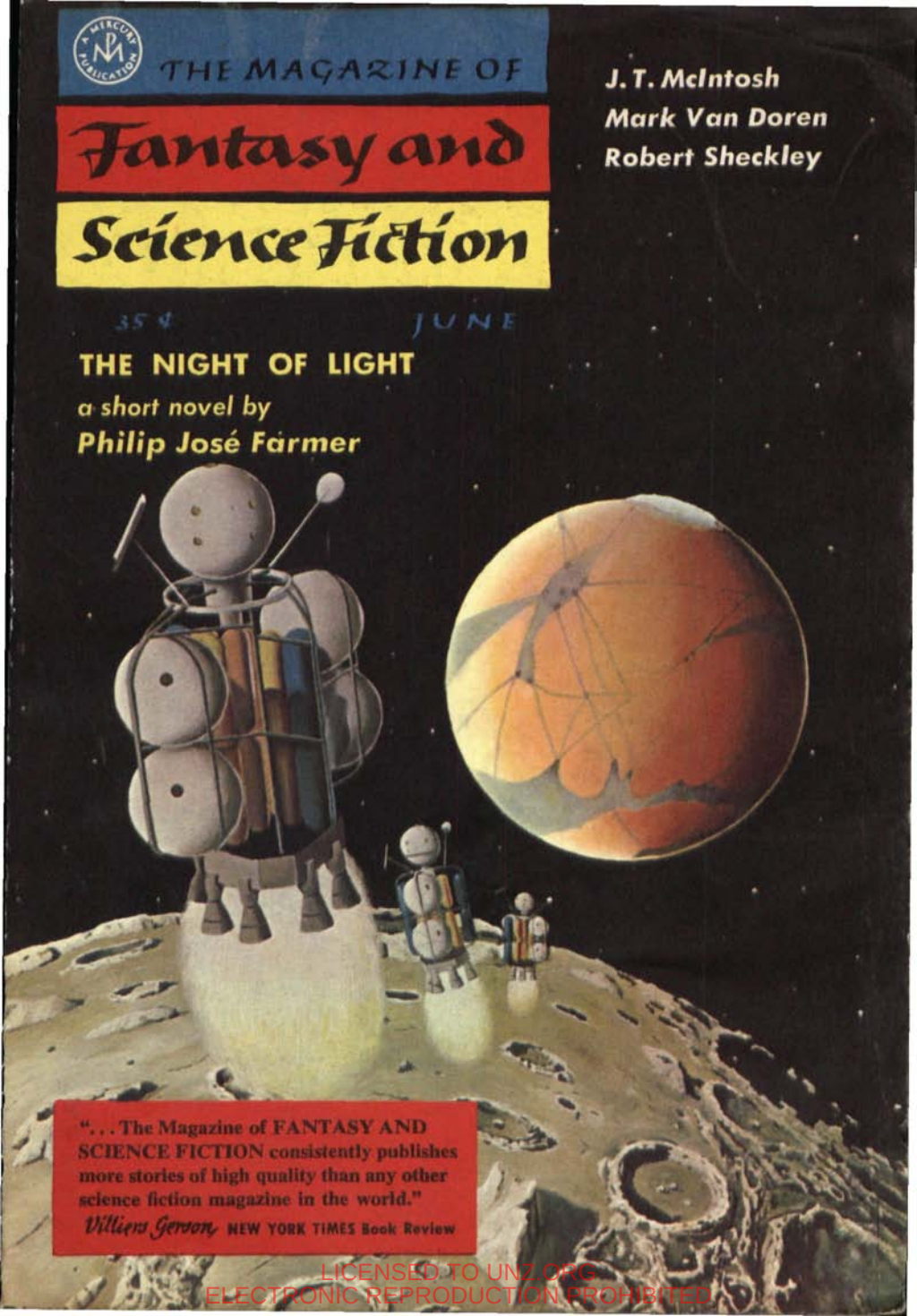
35¢ JUNE

THE NIGHT OF LIGHT

a short novel by
Philip José Farmer



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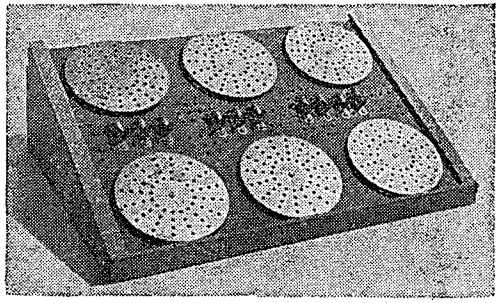

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 12, No. 6 JUNE

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COVER PAINTING BY JOHN PEDERSON
(*illustrating rockets over Deimos with Mars in background*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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Some of the greatest saints have been fairly spectacular sinners in their younger days; and the early lives of, for instance, Augustine of Hippo and Margaret of Cortona are not recommended reading for Sunday schools. Whether the potential of sainthood exists in Philip José Farmer's Father John Carmody is a question which, I am sure, both the priest and his creator would prefer to leave up to their Creator; but there is no doubting Carmody's credentials as a sinner. You have hitherto met him—in Attitudes *(F&SF, October, 1953) and* Father *(F&SF, July, 1955)—as a shrewd, adroit interstellar servant of God; but there was an earlier Carmody, whose nature, as Farmer now reveals it, may startle and even shock you. This short novel is a startling tale in many respects—daringly imaginative, vividly visual, almost surrealistic in its images and in its psychology, singularly convincing in its creation of an alien religious culture and in its revelation of that culture's extraordinary powers.*

The Night of Light

by PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

This happened on Dante's Joy, a planet bewildering to metaphysicians and physicists alike. It took place six years before John Carmody put on the maroon robes of a priest of the Order of St. Jairus. Those who knew John Carmody before he became ordained may now see how it was possible for even such a seemingly hopeless creature, fit only to be kept behind bars until he died, to become a man. First, it was necessary that the creature die, and . . .

ON EARTH IT WOULD BE A FEARFUL thing to see a man chasing down the street after the skin from a human face, a thin layer of tissue blown about like a piece of paper by the wind.

On the planet of Dante's Joy the sight aroused only a mild wonder in the few passersby. And they were interested because the chaser was an Earthman and, therefore, a curiosity in himself.

John Carmody ran down the long straight street, past the clifflike

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fronts of towers built of huge blocks of quartz-shot granite, with gargoyles and nightmare shapes grinning from the darkened interiors of many niches and with benedictions of god and goddess leaning from the many balconies.

A little man, dwarfed even more by the soaring walls and flying buttresses, he ran down the street in frantic pursuit of the fluttering transparent skin that turned over and over as it sailed upon the strong wind, over and over, showing the eyeholes, the earholes, the sagging empty gaping mouthhole, and trailing a few long and blond hairs from the line of the forehead, the scalp itself being absent.

The wind howled behind him, seeming to add its fury to his. Suddenly the skin, which had fluttered just within his reach, shot upwards on a strong draft coming around a building.

Carmody cursed and leaped, and his fingers touched the thing. But it flew up and landed on a balcony at least ten feet above him, lodged against the feet of the diorite image of the god Yess.

Panting, holding his aching sides, John Carmody leaned against the base of a buttress. Though he had once been in superb condition, as befitted the ex-welterweight amateur boxing champion of the Federation, his belly was swelling to make room for his increasing appetite, and fat was building up beneath his chin, like a noose.

It made little difference to him or to anybody else. He was not much to look at, anyway. He had a shock of blue-black hair, stiff and straight, irresistibly reminding one of a porcupine's quills. His head was melon-shaped, his forehead too high, his left eyelid drooped just enough to give his face a lopsided look, his nose was too long and sharp, his mouth too thin, his teeth too widely spaced.

He looked up at the balcony, cocking his head to one side like a bird, and saw he couldn't climb up the rough but slick wall. The windows were closed with heavy iron shutters, and the massive iron door was locked. A sign hung from its handle. On it was a single word in the alphabet of the people of the northern continent of Kareen. SLEEPING.

Carmody shrugged, smiled indifferently, in contrast to his former wildness to get at the skin, and walked away. Abruptly the wind, which had died down, sprang into life again and struck him like a blow from a huge fist.

He rolled with it as he would have rolled with a punch in the ring, kept his footing, and leaned into it, head down but bright blue eyes looking upwards. Nobody ever caught him with his eyes shut.

There was a phone booth on the corner, a massive marble box that could hold twenty people easily. Carmody hesitated outside it but, impelled by the screaming fury of

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the wind, he entered. He went to one of the six phones and lifted its receiver. But he did not sit down on the broad stone bench, preferring to dance around, to shift nervously from side to side and to keep his head cocked as one eye looked for intruders.

He dialed his number, Mrs. Kri's boarding house. When she answered the phone, he said, "Beautiful, this is John Carmody. I want to speak to Father Skelder or Father Ralloux."

Mrs. Kri giggled, as he knew she would, and said, "Father Skelder is right here. Just a second."

There was a pause, then a man's deep voice. "Carmody? What is it?"

"Nothing to get alarmed about," said Carmody. "I think . . ."

He waited for a comment from the other end of the line. He smiled, thinking of Skelder standing there, wondering what was going on, unable to say too much because of Mrs. Kri's presence. He could see the monk's long face with its many wrinkles and high cheekbones and hollow cheeks and shiny bald pate, the lips like a crab's pincers tightening until they squeezed themselves out of sight.

"Listen, Skelder, I've something to tell you. It may or may not be important, but it is rather strange." He stopped again and waited, knowing that the monk was foaming underneath that seemingly impassive exterior, that he would not care to display it at all and would hate himself for breaking down and asking Carmody what he had to tell. But he would break; he would ask. There was too much at stake.

"Well, well, what is it?" he finally snapped. "Can't you say over the phone?"

"Sure, but I wasn't going to bother if you weren't interested. Listen, about five minutes ago did anything strange happen to you or to anybody around you?"

There was another long pause, then Skelder said in a strained voice, "Yes. The sun seemed to flicker, to change color. I became dizzy and feverish. So did Mrs. Kri, and Father Ralloux."

Carmody waited until he was sure that the monk was not going to comment any further. "Was that all? Did nothing else happen to you or the others?"

"No. Why?"

Carmody told him about the skin of the unfinished face that had seemed to appear from the empty air before him. "I thought perhaps you might have had a similar experience."

"No; aside from the sick feeling, nothing happened."

Carmody thought he detected a huskiness in Skelder's voice. Well, he would find out later if the monk were concealing something. Meanwhile . . .

Suddenly, Skelder said, "Mrs. Kri has left the room. What is it you really wanted, Carmody?"

"I really wanted to compare notes

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about that flickering of the sun," he replied, crisply. "But I thought I'd tell you something of what I found out in the temple of Boonta."

"You ought to have found out just about everything," interrupted Skelder. "You were gone long enough. When you didn't show up last night, I thought that perhaps something had happened to you."

"You didn't call the police?"

"No, of course not," the monk's voice crackled. "Do you think that because I'm a priest I'm stupid? Besides, I hardly think you're worth worrying about."

Carmody chuckled. "Love thy fellow man as a brother. Well, I never cared much for my brother—or anybody else. Anyway, the reason I'm late, though only twenty hours or so behind time, is that I decided to take part in the big parade and the ceremonies that followed." He laughed again. "These Kareenians really enjoy their religion."

Skelder's voice was cold. "You took part in a temple orgy?"

Carmody hawhawed. "Sure. When in Rome, you know. However, it wasn't pure sensuality. Part of it was a very boring ritual, like all ritual; it wasn't until nightfall that the high priestess gave the signal for the big mêlée."

"You took part?"

"Sure. With the high priestess herself. It's all right; these people don't have your attitude towards sex, Skelder; they don't think it's dirty or a sin; they regard it as a sacrament, a great gift from the goddess; what would seem to you infinitely disgusting, wallowing in a mire of screaming sexfiends, is to them pure and chaste and goddess-blessed worship. Of course, I think your attitude and theirs are both wrong: sex is just a force that one ought to take advantage of in other people; but I will admit that the Kareenians' ideas are more fun than yours."

Skelder's voice was that of a slightly impatient and bored teacher lecturing a not-too-bright pupil. If he was angry, he managed to conceal it.

"You don't understand our doctrine. Sex is not in itself a dirty or sinful force. After all, it is the medium designed by God whereby the higher forms of life may be perpetuated. Sex in animals is as innocent as the drinking of water. And in the holy circle of matrimony a man and a woman may use this Godgiven force, may, through its sacred and tender rapture, become one, may approach that ecstasy, or be given an intimation of that ecstasy, which is the understanding and perhaps even glimpse of—"

"Jesus Christ!" said Carmody. "Spare me, spare me! What must your parishioners mutter under their breaths, what groans, every time you climb into the pulpit? God, or Whatever-it-is, help them!

"Anyway, I don't give a damn what the doctrine of the Church is. It's very evident that you yourself think that sex is dirty, even if it

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takes place within the permissible bonds of matrimony. It's disgusting, and the sooner the necessary evil is over and done with and one can take a shower, the better.

"However, I've gotten way off the track, which is that to the Kareenians these outbreaks of religio-sexual frenzy are manifestations of their gratitude to the Creator—I mean Creatrix—for being given life and the joys of life. Normally, they behave quite stuffily—"

"Look, Carmody, I don't need a lecture from you; after all, I am an anthropologist, I know perfectly well what the perverted outlook of these natives is, and—"

"Then why weren't you down here studying them?" said Carmody, still chuckling. "It's your anthropological duty. Why send me down? Were you afraid you'd get contaminated just watching? Or were you scared to death that you might get religion, too?"

"Let's drop the subject," said Skelder, emotionlessly. "I don't care to hear the depraved details; I just want to know if you found out anything pertinent to our mission."

Carmody had to smile at that word *mission*.

"Sure thing, Dad. The priestess said that the Goddess herself never appears except as a force in the bodies of her worshipers. But she maintains, as did a lot of the laymen I talked to, that the goddess's son, Yess, exists in the flesh, that they have seen and even talked to him. He will be in this city during the Sleep. The story is that he comes here because it was here that he was born and died and raised again."

"I know that," said the monk, exasperatedly. "Well, we shall see when we confront this impostor what he has to say. Ralloux is working on our recording equipment now so it'll be ready."

"OK," replied Carmody indifferently. "I'll be home within half an hour, provided I don't run across any interesting females. I doubt it; this city is dead—almost literally so."

He hung up the phone, smiling again at the look of intense disgust he could imagine on Skelder's face. The monk would be standing there for perhaps a minute in his black robes, his eyes closed, his lips working in silent prayer for the lost soul of John Carmody, then he would whirl and stalk upstairs to find Ralloux and tell him what had happened. Ralloux, clad in the maroon robe of the Order of St. Jairus, puffing on his pipe as he worked upon the recorders, would listen without much comment, would express neither disgust nor amusement over Carmody's behavior, would then say that it was too bad that they had to work with Carmody but that perhaps something good for Carmody, and for them, too, might come out of it. In the meantime, as there was nothing they could do to alter conditions on Dante's Joy or change Carmody's character, they might as well work with what they had.

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As a matter of fact, thought Carmody, Skelder detested his fellow-scientist and co-religionist almost as much as he did Carmody. Ralloux belonged to an order that was very much suspect in the eyes of Skelder's older and far more conservative organization. Moreover, Ralloux had declared himself to be in favor of the adoption of the Statement of Historical Flexibility, or Evolution of Doctrine, the theory then being offered by certain parties within the Church, and advocated by them as worthy of being made dogma. So strong had the controversy become that the Church was held to be in danger of another Great Schism, and some authorities held that the next twenty-five years would see profound changes and perhaps a crucial break-up in the Church itself.

Though both monks made an effort to keep their intercourse on a polite level, Skelder had lost his temper once, when they were discussing the possibility of allowing priests to marry—a mere evolution of discipline, rather than doctrine. Thinking of Skelder's red face and roaring jeremiads, Carmody had to laugh. He himself had contributed to the monk's wrath by pointed comments now and then, hugely enjoying himself, contemptuous at the same time of a man who could get so concerned over such a thing. Couldn't the stupid ass see that life was just a big joke and that the only way to get through it was to share it with the Joker?

It was funny that the two monks, who hated each other's guts, and he, who was disliked by both of them and who was contemptuous of them, should be together in this project. "Crime makes strange bedfellows," he had once said to Skelder in an effort to touch off the rage that always smoldered in the man's bony breast. His comment had failed of its purpose, for Skelder had icily replied that in this world the Church had to work with the tools at hand and Carmody, however foul, was the only one available. Nor did he think it a crime to expose the fraudulency of a false religion.

"Look, Skelder," Carmody had said, "you know that you and Ralloux were jointly commissioned by the Federation's Anthropological Society and by your Church to make a study of the so-called Night of Light on Dante's Joy and also, if possible, to interview Yess—providing he exists. But you've taken it on yourself to go further than that. You want to capture a god, inject him with chalarocheil and make him confess the whole hoax. Do you think that you won't get into trouble when you return to Earth?"

To which Skelder had replied that he was prepared to face any amount of trouble for this chance to kill the religion at its roots. The cult of Yess had spread from Dante's Joy to many a planet; its parody on the Church's ritual and Sacraments, plus the orgies to which it gave religious sanction had caused many defections

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from the Church's fold; there was the fantastic but true story of the diocese of the planet of Comeonin. The bishop and every member of his flock, forty thousand, had become apostates and . . .

Remembering this, Carmody smiled again. He wondered what Skelder would say if he knew how literal his words were about "killing the religion at its root." John Carmody had his own interpretation of that. In his coat pocket he carried a True Blue Needlenose, diminutive assassin, .03 caliber, capable of firing one hundred explosive bullets one after the other before needing a new clip. If Yess was flesh and blood and bone, then flesh could flower, blood could geyser, bone could splinter, and Yess would have another chance to rise again from the dead.

He'd like to see that. If he saw that, then he could believe anything.

Or could he? What if he did believe it? Then what? What difference would it make? So miracles were wrought? So what? What did that have to do with John Carmody, who existed outside miracles, who would never rise again from the dead, who was determined, therefore, to make the most of what little this universe had to offer?

A little of good food, steaks and onions, a little of good scotch, a little drunkenness so you could get a little closer but never close enough to the truth that you knew existed just on the other side of the walls of this hard universe, a little pleasure out of watching the pains and anxieties of other people and the stupid concerns they had over them when they could so easily be avoided, a little mockery, your greatest joy, actually, because it was only by laughing that you could tell the universe that you didn't care—not a false mockery, because he did not care, cared nothing for what others seemed to value so desperately—a little laughter, and then the big sleep. The last laugh would be had by the universe, but John Carmody wouldn't hear it, and so, you might say that he in reality had the last laugh, and . . .

At that moment he heard his name called by someone passing along the street. "Come on in, Tand!" Carmody shouted back in Kareenian. "I thought you'd gone to Sleep. You're not going to take the Chance, are you?"

Tand offered him a native-made cigarette, lit one of his own, blew smoke through narrow nostrils, and replied, "I've a very important deal to finish. It may take some time to complete it. So—I'll have to put off Sleeping as long as possible."

"That's strange," said Carmody, mentally noting that Tand had answered him in terms as vague as possible. "I've heard that you Kareenians think only about ethics and the nature of the universe and improving your shining souls, not at all about dirty old money."

Tand smiled. "We are no differ-

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ent than most peoples. We have our saints, our sinners, and our in-betweens. But we do seem to have a Galaxy-wide reputation, though quite a contradictory one. One depicts us as a race of ascetic and holy men; the other, as the most sensual and vile of so-called civilized people. And, of course, strange stories are told about us, largely because of the Night of Light. Whenever we travel to another planet, we find ourselves treated as something quite unique. Which I suppose we are, just as all peoples are."

Carmody did not ask the nature of the important deal that was keeping Tand from going to Sleep at once. It would have been bad Kareenian form to do so. Over the glowing tip of his cigarette he studied him. The fellow was about six feet tall, handsome according to his own race's standards. Like most intelligent beings of the Galaxy, he could pass for a member of Homo Sapiens at a distance, his ancestors having evolved along lines parallel to those of Terrestrials. Only when he got closer could you see that his face, though manlike, was not quite human. And the feathery-looking hair and blue-tinged nails and teeth gave you a start when you first met a native of Dante's Joy.

Tand wore a gray brimless conical headpiece like a fool's cap, stuck jauntily onto one side; his hair was clipped quite close except just above the wolflike ears, where it fell straight down to cover them; his neck was encircled in a high lacy collar but his thigh-length bright violet shirt was severe enough. A broad gray velvet belt gathered it in at the waist. His legs were bare, and his four-toed feet wore sandals.

Carmody had long suspected that the fellow was a member of the police force of this city of Rak. He always seemed to be around, and he had moved into the place that lodged Carmody the day after the Earthman had signed housepeace there.

Not that it mattered, thought Carmody. Even the police would be Sleeping in a day or so.

"What about yourself?" asked Tand. "Are you still insistent on taking the Chance?"

Carmody nodded and shot Tand a confident smile.

"What were you chasing?" added Tand.

Suddenly, Carmody's hands trembled, and he had to dig them in his pockets to hide them. His lips writhed in silent talk to himself.

Now, now, Carmody, none of this. You know nothing ever bothers you. But if that is so, why this shaking, this cold sickness in the dead center of your belly?

It was Tand's turn to smile, exposing his humanly shaped but blue-tinged teeth.

"I caught a glimpse of that thing you were chasing so desperately. It was the beginnings of a face, whether Kareenian or Terrestrial, I couldn't say. But since you doubtless conceived it, it must have been human."

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"Wh-what d'ya mean, *conceived?* I, Conceived . . . ?"

"Oh, yes. You saw it form in the air in front of you, didn't you?"

"Impossible!"

"No, nor fantastic. The phenomenon, though not common, does occur now and then. Usually, a change takes place *in* the body of the conceiver, not outside. Your problem must be extraordinarily strong, if this thing takes place outside you."

"I have no problems I can't whip," growled Carmody out of one corner of his mouth, his cigarette bobbing from the other corner like a challenging rapier.

Tand shrugged. "Have it your own way. My only advice for you is to take a spaceship while there is still time. The last one leaves within four hours. After that, none will arrive or depart until the time for the Sleep is past. By then, who knows . . . ?"

Carmody wondered if Tand was being ironic, if he knew that he could not leave Dante's Joy, that he'd be arrested the moment he touched a Federation port.

He also wondered if Tand could have the slightest idea what he was planning as a means to leave Dante's Joy in full safety. Now, having regained full control of his hands, he took them from his pockets and removed the cigarette from his mouth. *Damn it,* he said, silently mouthing the words, *why are you hesitant, Carmody, old buddy? Lost your guts? No, not you. It's you against the universe, as it has always been, and you've never been afraid. You either attack a problem, and destroy it, or else ignore it. But this is so strange you can't seem to grapple with it. Well, so what? Wait until the strangeness wears off, then . . . BLAM! you've got it in your hands and you'll rip it apart, choke the life out of it, just as you did with—*

His hands clenched in memory of what they had done, and his lips stiffened into the beginning of a silent snarl. That face blowing through the air. Wasn't there a resemblance . . . could it have been . . . *No!*

"You are asking me to believe the impossible," he said. "I know that many strange things happen here on this planet, but what I saw, well, I just can't think that—"

"I have seen you Earthmen before when confronted by this," interrupted Tand. "To you it seems like something from one of your fairy-tales or myths. Or, perhaps, from that incredible phenomenon you call a nightmare, which we Kareenians do not experience."

"No," said Carmody. "Your nightmares occur outside you, every seven years. And even then most of you escape them by Sleeping, while we human beings can't encounter them except by means of sleeping."

He paused, smiled his rapid, cold smile, and added, "But I am different from most Earthmen. I do not dream; I have no nightmares."

"I understand," replied Tand

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evenly and apparently without malice, "that that is because you differ from most of them—and us—in that you have no conscience. Most Earthmen, unless I have been misinformed about them, would suffer troublings of the mind if they had killed their wives in cold blood."

The narrow walls of the booth thundered with Carmody's laughter. Tand looked emotionlessly at him until he had subsided into chuckling, then said, "You laugh loud enough but not nearly so loud as that."

He waved his hand to indicate the wind howling down the street.

Carmody did not understand what he meant. He was disappointed; he'd expected the usual violent reaction to his amusement at the subject of his "crime." Perhaps the fellow *was* a policeman. Otherwise, in the face of Carmody's laughter, how explain the stiff self-control? But it might be that he was untouched because the murder had happened on Earth and to a Terrestrial. An individual of one species found it difficult to get excited about the murder of a person belonging to another, especially if it was 10,000 light-years away.

However, there was the universally admitted deep empathy of the natives of Dante's Joy; they were acknowledged to be the most ethical beings in the world, the most sensitive.

Abruptly bored, Carmody said, "I'm going back to Mother Kri's. You coming along?"

"Why not? Tonight's the last supper she'll be serving for some time. She's going to Sleep immediately afterwards."

They walked down the street, silent for awhile though the wind, erratic as ever, had died down and made conversation possible. Around them towered the massive gargoyle-and-god-decorated buildings, built to last forever, to withstand any treatment from wind, fire, or cataclysm while their inmates slept. Here and there strode a lonely, silent native, intent on some business or other before he took the Sleep. The crowds of the day before were gone, and with them the noise, bustle, and sense of life.

Carmody was watching a young female cross the street and was thinking that if you put a sack on her head you wouldn't be able to distinguish her from a Terrestrial. There were the same long legs, the wide pelvis, seductive swaying of hips, narrow waist, and flowering of breasts . . . suddenly the light had changed color, had flickered. He looked up at the noonday sun. Blindingly white before, it was now an enormous disc of pale violet ringed by a dark red. He felt dizzy and hot, feverish, and the sun blurred and seemed to him to melt like a big ball of taffy, dripping slowly down the sky.

Then just as quickly as they had come, the dizziness and faintness were gone, the sun once again was an eye-searing white fire, and he had to look away from it.

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"What the hell was *that?*" he said to no one in particular, forgetting that Tand was with him. He found out he was shivering with cold and was drained of his strength as if he'd been upended and decanted of half his blood.

"What in God's name?" he said again, hoarsely. Now he remembered that something like this had happened less than an hour ago, that the sun had changed to another color—violet? blue?—and that he'd been hot as if a fire had sprung up in his bowels and that everything had blurred. But the feeling had been much quicker, just a flash. And the air about three feet before him had seemed to harden, to become shiny, almost as if a mirror were forming from the molecules of air. Then, out of the seemingly much denser air, that face had appeared, that half-face, the first layer of skin, tissue-thin, whisked away at once by the wind.

He shivered. The wind's springing up again did not help his coolness. Then he yelled. About ten feet away from him, drifting along the ground, blown down the street and rolled into a ball by now, was another piece of skin. He took a step forward, preparatory to running after it, then stopped. He shook his head, rubbed his long nose in seeming bewilderment, and unexpectedly grinned.

"This could get you down after a while," he said aloud. "But they're not getting their hooks into John Carmody. That skin or whatever it is can go floating on down into the sewer, where it belongs, for all I care."

He took out another cigarette, lit it, then looked for Tand. The native was in the middle of the street, bending over the girl. She was on her back, her legs and arms rigid but shaking, her eyes wide open and glazed, her mouth working as she chewed her lips and drooled blood and foam.

Carmody ran over, took one look, and said, "Convulsions. You're doing the right thing, Tand. Keep her from biting her tongue. Did you have medical training, too?"

He could have bit his own tongue then. Now the fellow would know a little more of his past. Not that it would help Tand much in gathering evidence about him, but he didn't like to reveal anything at all. Not without getting paid for it in one form or another. Never give anything away! It's against the laws of the universe; to keep living you have to take in as much or more than you put out.

"No, I didn't," replied Tand, not looking up but intent on seeing that the wadded handkerchief thrust into her mouth didn't choke her. "But my profession requires I learn a certain amount of first aid. Poor girl, she should have gone to Sleep a day earlier. But I suppose she didn't know she was liable to be affected this way. Or, perhaps, she did know and was taking the

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Chance so she might cure herself."

"What do you mean?"

Tand pointed at the sun. "When it discolors like that it seems to raise a tempest among one's brainwaves. Any epileptoid tendencies are revealed then. Provided the person is awake. Actually, though, you don't see this very often. Hereditary tendencies to such behavior have been nearly wiped out; those who gamble on the Chance usually are struck down, though not always. If one does come through, he is cured forever."

Carmody looked unbelievingly at the skies. "A flareup on the sun, eighty million miles away, can cause that?"

Tand shrugged and stood up. The girl had quit writhing and seemed to be peacefully asleep. "Why not? On your own planet, so I've been told, you are much influenced by solar storms and other fluctuations in the sun's radiations. Your people —like ours—have even charted the climactic, psychological, physical, business, political, sociological, and other cycles that are directly dependent upon changes on the surfaces of the sun, that can be predicted a century or more in advance. So why be surprised because our own sun does the same, though to a much more intense degree?"

Carmody began to make a gesture of bewilderment and helplessness, then halted his hand because he did not want anybody to think that he could for a moment be uncertain about anything.

"What is the explanation for all this—this hibernating, these incredible physiological transformations, this . . . this physical projection of mental images?"

"I wish I knew," said Tand. "Our astronomers have studied the phenomenon for thousands of years, and your own people have established a base upon an asteroid to examine it. However, after their first experience with the time of the Chance, the Terrestrials now abandon their base when the time for Sleep comes. Which makes it practically impossible to make a close examination. We have the same trouble. Our own scientists are too busy fighting their own psychical stress at this period to be able to make a study."

"Yes, but instruments aren't affected during these times."

Tand smiled his blue smile. "Aren't they? They register a wild hodgepodge of waves as if the machines themselves were epileptic. Perhaps these recordings may be very significant. But who can translate them? No one, so far."

He paused, then said, "That is wrong. There are three who could explain. But they won't."

Carmody followed the direction of his pointing finger and saw the bronze statuary group at the end of the street: the goddess Boonta protecting her son Yess from the attack of Algul, the dark god, his twin brother, in the metamorphosis of a dragon.

"Them . . . ?"

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"Yes, them."

Carmody grinned mockingly and said, "I'm surprised to find an intelligent man like yourself subscribing to such a primitive belief."

"Intelligence has nothing at all to do with religious belief," replied Tand. He bent down over the girl, opened her eyelid, felt her pulse, then rose. He removed his hat with one hand and with the other made a circular sign.

"She's dead."

There was a delay of about fifteen minutes. Tand phoned into the hospital, and soon the long red oil-burning steam-driven ambulance rolled up. The driver jumped off the high seat over the front of the vehicle, which was built much like a landau, and said, "You're lucky. This will be our last call. We're taking the Sleep in the next hour."

Tand had gone through the girl's pockets and produced her papers of identification. Carmody noticed that he'd done so with a suspiciously policemanlike efficiency. Tand gave them to the ambulance men and told them that it would be best probably to wait until after the Sleep before notifying her parents.

Afterwards, as they walked down the street, Carmody said, "Who takes care of the fire department, the police work, the hospitals, the supplying of food?"

"Our fires don't amount to anything because of the construction of our buildings. Stocking food for seven days is no real problem; so few are up and out. As for the police, well, there is no law during this time. No human law, anyway."

"What about a cop who takes the Chance?"

"I said that the law is suspended then."

By then they'd walked out of the business district into the residential. Here the buildings did not stand shoulder to shoulder but were set in the middle of large yards. Plenty of breathing space. But the sense of massiveness, of overpoweringness, of eternity frozen in stone still hovered in the air, as these houses were every one at least three stories high and built of massive blocks and had heavy burglarproof iron doors and windows. Even the doghouses were built to withstand a siege.

It was seeing several of these that reminded Carmody of the sudden cessation of animal life. The birds that had filled the air with their cries the day before were gone; the lyan and kin, doglike and catlike pets, which were usually seen in large numbers even on the downtown streets, were gone. And the squirrels seemed to have retreated into the holes in their trees.

Tand, in reply to Carmody's remark about this, said, "Yes, animals instinctively sleep during the Night, have been doing it, from all evidences, since the birth of life here. Only man has lost the instinctive ability, only man has a choice or the knowledge of using drugs to put him in a state close to suspended

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animation. Apparently, even prehistoric man knew of the plant which gives the drug that will induce this sleep; there are cave paintings depicting the Sleep."

They stopped before the house belonging to the female whom Carmody called Mother Kri. It was here that visiting Earthmen, willy-nilly, were quartered by the Kareenian government. It was a four-storied circular house built of limestone and mortar, capped by a thick shale roof, and set in a yard at least two hundred feet square.

A long winding tree-lined walk led up to the great porch, which itself ran completely around the house. Halfway up the walk, Tand paused beside a tree.

"See anything peculiar in this?" he asked the Earthman.

As was his habit when thinking, Carmody spoke aloud, not looking at his audience but staring off to one side as if he were talking to an invisible person. "It looks like a mature tree, yet it's rather short, about seven feet high. Something like a dwarf cottonwood. But it has a double trunk that joins about a third of the way up. And two main branches, instead of many. Almost as if it had arms and legs. If I were to come upon it on a dark night, I might think it was a tree just getting ready to take a walk."

"You're close," said Tand. "Feel the bark. Real bark, eh? It looks like it to the naked eye. But under the microscope, the cellular structure is rather peculiar. Neither like a man's nor a tree's. Yet like both. And why not?"

He paused, smiled enigmatically at Carmody, and said, "It is Mrs. Kri's husband."

Carmody replied coolly, "It is?" He laughed and said, "He's a rather sedentary character, isn't he?"

Tand raised his featherish eyebrows.

"Exactly. During his life as a man he preferred to sit around, to watch the birds, to read books of philosophy. Taciturn, he avoided most people. As a result he never got very far in his job, which he hated.

"Mrs. Kri had to earn money for them by starting this lodging house; she retaliated by making his life miserable with nagging him, but she could never fill him with her own enthusiasms and ambitions. Finally, partly in an endeavor to get away from her, I think, he took the Chance. And this is what happened. Most people said he failed. Well, I don't know. He got what he really wanted, his deepest wish."

He laughed softly. "Dante's Joy is the planet where you get what you really want. That is why it is off-limits to most of the Federation's people. It is dangerous to have your unconscious prayers answered in full and literal detail."

Carmody didn't understand everything he was being told, but he jauntily said, "Has anybody taken X-rays? Does he—it—have a brain?"

"Yes, of a sort, but what woody

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thoughts it thinks I wouldn't know."

Carmody laughed again. "Vegetable and/or man, eh? Look, Tand, what are you trying to do, scare me into getting off the planet or into taking the Sleep? Well, it won't work. Nothing frightens me, nothing at all."

Abruptly, his laughter ended in a choking sound, and he became rigid, staring straight ahead. His strength poured from him, and his body grew hot from his belly on out. About three feet before him there was a flickering like a heat wave, then, as if the air were solidifying into a mirror, the vibrations condensed into matter. Slowly, like a balloon collapsing as air poured out of holes torn in it, the bag of skin that had appeared folded in on itself.

But not before Carmody had recognized the face.

"Mary!"

It was some time before he could bring himself to touch the thing that lay on the sidewalk. For one thing, he didn't have the strength. Something had sucked it out of him.

Only his reluctance to display fear before somebody else moved him to pick it up.

"Real skin?" said Tand.

From someplace in the hollowness within him Carmody managed to conjure a laugh.

"Feels just like hers did, as soft, as unblemished. She had the most beautiful complexion in the world."

He frowned. "When it began to go bad . . ."

His fist opened out, and the skin dropped to the ground. "Empty as she was essentially empty. Nothing in the head. No guts."

"You're a cool one," said Tand. "Or shallow. Well, we shall see."

He picked up the bag and held it in both hands so it streamed out like a flag in the breeze. Carmody saw that there was now not only the face itself, but the scalp was complete and the front of the neck and part of the shoulders were there. Moreover, many long blond hairs floated like spider webs from the scalp, and the first layer of the eyeball itself had formed beneath the eyelids.

"You are beginning to get the hang of it," said Tand.

"I? I'm not doing that; I don't even know what's going on."

Tand touched his head and heart. "These know." He wadded the tissue in his fist and dropped it in a trashbasket on the porch.

"Ashes to ashes," said Carmody.

"We shall see," replied Tand again.

II

By this time scattered clouds had appeared, one of which masked the sun. The light that filtered through made everything gray, ghostly. Inside the house the effect was even worse. It was a group of phantoms that greeted them as they entered the dining room. Mother Kri, a Vegan named Aps, and two Earthmen, all sitting at a round table in a great darkened room flickeringly lit with

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seven candles set in a candelabrum. Behind the hostess was an altar and a stone carving of the Mother Goddess holding in her arms Yess and Algul as twin babies, Yess placidly sucking upon her right nipple, Algul biting down upon the left and scratching the breast with unbabylike claws, the Mother Boonta regarding both impartially with a beatific smile. On the table itself, dominating the candelabrum and the plates and goblets, were the symbols of Boonta: the cornucopia, the flaming sword, the wheel.

Mother Kri, short, fat, large-bosomed, smiled at them. Her blue teeth looked black in the duskiness.

"Welcome, gentlemen. You are just in time for the Last Supper."

"The Last Supper," Carmody called on his way to the washroom. "Hah? I'll be my namesake, good old John. But who plays Judas?"

He heard Father Skelder snort with indignation and Father Ralloux's booming, "There's a little Judas in all of us."

Carmody could not resist stopping and saying, "Are you pregnant, too, dearie?" and then he walked away, laughing uproariously to himself. When he came back and sat down at the table, Carmody submitted with a smile to Skelder's saying grace and Mother Kri's asking for a blessing. It was easier to sit silent for a moment than to make trouble by insisting on the food being passed at once.

"When in Rome . . ." he said to Skelder and smiled to himself at the monk's puzzlement. "Pass the salt, please," he continued, "but don't spill it."

Then he burst into a roar of laughter as Skelder did exactly that. "Judas come back to life!"

The monk's face flushed, and he scowled. "With your attitude, Mr. Carmody, I doubt very much if you'll get through the Chance."

"Worry about yourself," said Carmody. "As for me, I intend to find some goodlooking and likely female and concentrate so much on her I'll not notice until long after that the seven days are up. You ought to try it, Prior."

Skelder tightened his lips. His long thin face was built for showing disapproval; the many deep lines in forehead and cheeks, the bony angles of cheek and jaw, the downward slant of the long meaty nose, the pattern of straight lines and whorls, these made up the blueprint of the stern judge, showed the fingerprints of a Maker who had squeezed out of this putty flesh an image of the righteous, then set the putty in a freezing blast to harden into stone.

The stone just now showed signs of being human, for it was distended and crimsoned with hot blood flooding beneath the skin. The pale blue-gray eyes glared from beneath pale gold eyebrows.

Father Ralloux's gentle voice fell like a benediction upon the room.

"Anger is not exactly one of the virtues."

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He was a strange-looking man, this priest with his face made up of such contradictory features, the big pitcher-handle ears, red hair, pug nose, and broad smiling lips of the cartoon Irishman, all repudiated by the large dark eyes with their long feminine lashes. His shoulders were broad and his neck was thickly muscled, but his powerful arms ended in delicate and beautiful woman's hands. The soft liquid eyes looked gravely and honestly at you, yet you got the impression that there was something troubled in them.

Carmody had wondered why the fellow was Skelder's partner, for he was not at all well known, as the older man was. But he had learned that Ralloux had a fine reputation in anthropological circles. In fact, he was placed on a higher plane than his superior, but Skelder was in charge of the expedition because of his prominence in other fields. The lean monk was head of the conservative faction in the Church that was trying to reform the current morality of the laity; his taped image and voice had appeared upon every Federation planet that owned a caster; he had thundered forth a denunciation of nudity in the private home and on the public beach, of brief-contract marital relations, of polymorphous-perverse sexual attitudes, of all that had once been forbidden by Western Terrestrial society and especially by the Church but was now tolerated, if not condoned, among the laymen because it was socially acceptable. He wanted to use the Church's strongest weapons in enforcing a return to former standards; when the liberals and moderates in the Church accused him of being Victorian, he gladly adopted the title, declaring that that age was the one to which he desired they turn back. It was this background that was responsible now for the furious look he was giving Father Ralloux.

"Our Lord became angry when the occasion demanded! Remember the money-changers and the fig tree!" He pointed a long finger at his companion. "It is a misconception to think of Him as the gentle Jesus! One merely has to take the trouble to read the Gospels to perceive at once that He was a hard man in many respects, that—"

"My God, I'm hungry," said Carmody loudly, interjecting not only to stop the tirade but because he was famished. It seemed to him he'd never been so empty.

Tand said, "You'll find you'll have to eat enormous quantities of food during the next seven days. Your energy will be drained out as fast as it's put in."

Mother Kri went out of the room and quickly returned carrying a plate full of cakes. "There are seven pieces, gentlemen, each baked in the likeness of one of the Seven Fathers of Yess. These are always baked for certain religious feasts, one of which is the Last Supper before the Sleep. I hope you gentlemen do not mind

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partaking. A bit from each cake and a sip of wine with each is customary. This communion symbolizes not only that you are partaking of the flesh and blood of Yess but that you are given the power to create your own god, as the Seven did."

"Ralloux and I cannot do that," replied Skelder. "We would be committing a sacrilege."

Mrs. Kri looked disappointed but brightened when Carmody and Aps, the Vegan, said they would participate. Carmody thought it would be politic in case he wished to use Mrs. Kri later on.

"I do not think," said the woman, "that you would mind, Father Skelder, if you knew the story of the Seven."

"I do know," he said. "I made a study of your religion before I came here. I do not allow myself to remain ignorant on any subject if I can help it. As I understand it, the myth goes that in the beginning of time the goddess Boonta had two sons, self-conceived. Upon reaching manhood, one of the sons, the evil one, slew the other, cut him into seven pieces and buried them in widely separated places, so that his mother would not be able to gather them together and bring him back to life. The evil son, or Algul as you call him, ruled the world, restrained only by his mother from destroying humanity altogether. Wickedness was everywhere; men were thoroughly rotten, as in the time of our Noah. Those few good people who did pray to the Mother to restore her good son, Yess, were told that if seven good men could be found in one place and at one time, her son would be resurrected. Volunteers came forth and tried to raise Yess, but never were enough qualified so that seven good men existed on this world at one time. Seven centuries went by and the world became more evil.

"Then, one day, seven men gathered together, seven *good* men, and Algul, the wicked son, in an effort to frustrate them, put everybody to sleep except seven of his most wicked worshippers. But the good seven fought off the Sleep, had a mystical union, a sort of psychical intercourse with the Mother"—Skelder's face twisted with distaste—"each of them becoming her lover, and the seven pieces of the son Yess were pulled together, reunited, and became alive. The evil seven turned into all sorts of monsters and the seven good became minor gods, consorts of the Mother. Yess restored the world to its former state. His twin brother was torn into seven pieces, and these were buried at different places over the earth. Since then, good has dominated evil, but there is still much evil left in the world, and the legend goes that if seven absolutely wicked men can gather together during the time of the Sleep, they will be able to resurrect Algul."

He paused, smiled as if in quiet mockery of this myth, then said, "There are other aspects, but that is

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the essence. Obviously, a symbolical story of the conflict between good and evil in this universe: many of its features are universal; they may be found in almost every religion of the Galaxy."

"Symbolism or not, universal or not," said Mrs. Kri, "the fact remains that seven men *did* create their god Yess. I know because I have seen him walking the streets of Kareen, have touched him, have seen him perform his miracles, though he does not like to do them. And I know that during the Sleep there are evil men who gather to create Algul. For they know that if he comes to life, then they, according to ancient promise, will rule this world and have all they desire."

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Kri. I do not want to decry your religion, but how do you *know* this man who claims to be Yess is he?" said Skelder. "And how could mere men fashion a god out of thin air?"

"I know because I know," she said, giving the age-old and unarguable answer of the believer. She touched her huge bosom. "Something in here tells me it is so."

Carmody gave his long high-pitched irritating laughter.

"She's got you there, Skelder. Hoist by your own petard. Isn't that the ultimate defense of your own Church when every other has crumbled?"

"No," replied Skelder coldly, "it is not. For one thing, not one of our so-called defenses crumbles. All remain rockfast, impervious to the jeerings of petty atheists or the hammerblows of organized governments. The Church is imperishable, and so are its teachings; its logic is irrefutable; the Truth is its possession."

Carmody smirked but refused to talk any more about it. After all, what difference did it make what Skelder or anybody else thought? The thing he wanted now was action; he was tired of fruitless words.

Mrs. Kri had risen from the table and was clearing up the dishes. Carmody, wishing to get more information out of her, and also wanting the others unable to hear him, said that he would help her clean up. Mrs. Kri was charmed; she liked Carmody very much because he was always doing little things for her and giving her little compliments now and then. Astute enough to see that he had a purpose behind this, she still liked what he did.

In the kitchen, he said, "Come on, Mother Kri, tell me the truth. Have you actually *seen* Yess? Just as you've seen me?"

She handed him a wet dish to dry.

"I've seen him more times than I have you. I had him in for dinner once."

Carmody had difficulty swallowing this prosaic contact with divinity. "Oh, really?"

"Really."

"And did he go to the bathroom afterwards?" he asked, thinking that this was the ultimate test, the basic distinction between man and god.

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You could think of a deity eating, perhaps to render his presence easier to his worshippers, perhaps also to enjoy the good things of life, but excretion seemed so unnecessary, so un-divine that, well . . .

"Of course," said Mrs. Kri. "Does Yess not have blood and bowels just as you and I?"

Skelder walked in at that moment, ostensibly for a drink of water but actually, thought Carmody, to overhear them.

"Of course he does," the monk said. "Do not all men? Tell me, Mrs. Kri, how long have you known Yess?"

"Since I was a child. I am fifty now."

"And he has not aged a bit, has always remained youthful, untouched by time?" said Skelder, his voice tinged with sarcasm.

"Oh, no. He is an old man now. He may die at any time."

The Earthmen raised their eyebrows.

"Perhaps there is some misunderstanding here," said Skelder, speaking so swiftly as to give the impression of swooping down vulturelike upon Mrs. Kri. "Some difference in definition, or in language, perhaps. A god, as we understand the term, does not die."

Tand, who had come into the kitchen in time to catch the last few words, said, "Was not your god slain upon a cross?"

Skelder bit his lip, then smiled, and said, "I must ask you to forgive me. And I must confess that I have been guilty of a lapse of memory, guilty because I allowed a second of anger to cloud my thinking. I forgot for the moment the distinction between the Human and the Divine Nature of Christ. I was thinking in purely pagan terms, and even there I was wrong because the pagans' gods died. Perhaps you Kareenians make the same distinction between the human and the divine nature of your god Yess. I do not know. I have not been on this planet long enough to determine that; there was so much else to assimilate before I could study the finer points of your theology."

He stopped, sucked in a deep breath, then, as if he were getting ready to dive into the sea, he thrust his head forward, hunched his bony shoulders, and said, "I still think that there is a vast difference between your conception of Yess and ours of Christ. Christ was resurrected and then went to Heaven to rejoin His Father. Moreover, His death was necessary if He were to take on the sins of the world and save mankind."

"If Yess dies, he will someday be born again."

"You do not understand. There is the very important difference that—"

"That your story is true and ours false, a pagan myth?" replied Tand, smiling. "Who may say what is fact, what is myth, or whether or not a myth is not as much fact as, say, this table here? Whatever operates to bring about action in this world is

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fact, and if a myth engenders action, then is it not a fact? The words spoken here and now will die out in ever-weakening vibrations, but who knows what undying effect they may cause?"

Suddenly the room darkened, and everybody in it clutched for some hold, the top of a chair, the edge of a table, anything to keep oneself steady. Carmody felt that wave of heat sweep through him and saw the air before him harden, seeming to become glass.

Blood burst out of the mirror, shot as if from a hose nozzle into his face, blinded him, drenched him, filled his open mouth, drove its salty taste down his throat.

There was a scream, not from him but someone beside him. He jumped back, pulled his handkerchief out, wiped away the blood from his eyes, saw that the glassiness was gone and with it the spurt of blood, but that the table and the floor beside it were filmed in crimson. There must have been at least ten quarts of it, he thought, just what you would expect from a woman weighing one hundred pounds.

There was no chance to follow that up for he had to skip to one side to avoid Skelder and Mrs. Kri, who were wrestling across the kitchen, Mrs. Kri doing the pushing because she was heavier and, perhaps, stronger. Certainly, she was the more aggressive, for she was doing her best to strangle the monk. He was clutching at the hands around his neck and screaming, "Take your filthy hands off me, you . . . you *female!*"

Carmody roared with laughter, and the sound seemed to break the maniacal spell possessing Mrs. Kri. As if she were waking from a sleep, she stopped, blinked her eyes, dropped her hands, and said, "What was I doing?"

"You were choking the life out of me!" shouted Skelder. "What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, my," she said to no one in particular. "It's getting later than I thought. I'd better get to sleep at once. All at once it seemed to me that you were the most hateful man in the world, because of what you said about Yess, and I wanted to kill you. Really, I do get a little irked at what you say but not that much."

Tand said, "Apparently, your anger is much deeper than you thought, Mrs. Kri. You'd driven it into your unconscious, wouldn't admit it to yourself, and so—"

He didn't get to finish. She had turned to look at Carmody and had seen for the first time that blood covered him and was everywhere in the kitchen. She screamed.

"Shut your damn mouth!" said Carmody, quite passionlessly, and he struck her across the lips. She stopped screaming, blinked again, and said, in a quivering voice, "Well, I'd better clean up this mess. I'd hate to wake up and try to scrub off this stuff after it's dried. You're sure you're not hurt?"

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He didn't answer her but instead walked out of the kitchen and upstairs to his room, where he began to take off the wet clothing. Ralloux, who had followed him, said, "I am beginning to get scared. If such things can happen, and they obviously are not hallucinations, then who knows what will become of us?"

"I thought we had a little device that would make us quite safe?" said Carmody, peeling off the last of his sticky clothes and heading for the shower. "Or are you not sure of it?" He laughed at Ralloux's expression of despair and spoke from behind the veil of hot water hurtling over his head. "What's the matter? You really scared?"

"Yes, I am. Aren't you?"

"I, frightened? No, I have never been afraid of anything in my whole life. I'm not saying that to cover up, either. I don't really know what it is to feel fear."

"I strongly suspect you don't know what it is to feel *anything*," said Ralloux. "I wonder sometimes if you *do* have a soul. It must be there somewhere but thrust down so deep that nobody, including yourself, can see it. Otherwise . . ."

Carmody laughed and began soaping his hair.

"The headthumper at Johns Hopkins said I was a congenital psychopath, that I was born incapable of even understanding a moral code, I was beyond guilt, beyond virtue, not born with an illness of the mind, you understand, just lacking something, whatever it is that makes a human being human. He made no bones about telling me that I was one of those rare birds before which the science of the Year of Our Lord 2256 is completely helpless. He was sorry, he said, but I would have to be committed for the rest of my life, probably kept under mild sedation so I would be harmless and cooperative, and undoubtedly would be the subject of thousands of experiments in order to determine what it is that makes a constitutional psychopath."

Carmody paused, stepped from the shower, and began drying himself.

"Well," he continued, smiling, "you can see that I couldn't put up with that. Not John Carmody. So—I escaped from Hopkins, escaped from Earth itself, got to Springboard—on the edge of the Galaxy, farthest colonized planet of the Federation, stayed there a year, made a fortune smuggling sodompears, was almost caught by Raspold—you know, the galactic Sherlock Holmes—but eluded him and got here where the Federation has no jurisdiction. But I don't intend to stay here; not that it wouldn't be a bad world, because I could make money here, too, the food and liquor are good, and the females are just unhuman enough to attract me. But I want to show Earth up for what it is, a stable for stupid asses. I intend to go back to Earth to live there in complete immunity from arrest. And to do pretty well what I please, though I shall

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be discreet about some things."

"If you think you can do that, you must be crazy. You would be arrested the moment you stepped off the ship."

Carmody laughed. "You think so? You know, don't you, that the Federal Anti-Social Bureau depends for its information and partly for its directives upon the Boojum?"

Ralloux nodded.

"Well, the Boojum after all is only a monster protein memory bank and probability computer. It has stored away in its cells all the available information about one John Carmody and it undoubtedly has issued orders that all ships leaving Dante's Joy should be searched for him. But what if proof comes that John Carmody is dead? Then the Boojum cancels all directives concerning Carmody, and it retires the information to mechanical files. Then, when a colonist from, say, Wildenwooly, who has made his pile there and wants to spend it on Earth, comes to the home planet, who is going to bother him, even if he does look remarkably like John Carmody?"

"But that's preposterous! In the first place, how is the Boojum going to get proof positive that you are dead? In the second place, when you land on Earth, your fingers, retina, and brainwaves will be printed and identified."

Carmody grinned joyfully. "I wouldn't care to tell you how I'll manage the first. As for the second, so what if my prints are filed? They won't be cross-checked; they'll just be those of some immigrant, who was born on a colony-planet and who is being recorded for the first time. I won't even bother to change my name."

"What if someone recognizes you?"

"In a world of ten billion population? I'll take my chance."

"What is to prevent my telling the authorities?"

"Do dead men tell?"

Ralloux paled but did not flinch. His expression was still the grave-faced gentle monk's, his large shining black eyes staring honestly at Carmody but giving him a slightly ludicrous appearance because of their unexpectedness in that snub-nosed freckled big-lipped pitcher-eared setting. He said, "Do you intend to kill me?"

Carmody laughed uproariously. "No, it won't be necessary. Do you think for one moment either you or Skelder will come through the Night alive or in your right mind? You've seen what has happened during the few brief flickers we've had. Those were preludes, tunings up. What of the real Night?"

"What about what happened to you?" said Ralloux, still pale.

Carmody shrugged his shoulders, ran his hand through his blue-black porcupinelike hair, now clean of blood. "Apparently my unconscious or whatever you call it is projecting pieces of Mary's body, reconstructing the crime, you might say. How it can

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take a strictly subjective phenomenon and turn it into objective reality, I don't know. Tand says there are several theories that attempt to explain the whole thing scientifically, that leave the supernatural out. It doesn't matter. It didn't bother me when I cut up Mary into little pieces, and it won't bother me to have pieces of her come floating back into my life. I could swim through her blood, or anybody else's, to reach my goal."

He paused, looked narrow-eyed but still grinning at Ralloux and said, "What did *you* see during those flickers?"

Ralloux, even paler, gulped. He made the sign of the cross.

"I don't know why I should tell you. But I will. I was in Hell."

"In Hell?"

"Burning. With the other damned. With ninety-nine percent of all those who had lived, are living, and will live. Billions upon billions."

Sweat poured out of his face. "It was not something imagined. I *felt* the agony. Mine, and the others'."

He fell silent, while Carmody cocked his head to one side like one puzzled bird trying to figure out another. Then Ralloux murmured, "Ninety-nine percent."

"So," Carmody said, "that is what you worry about most, that is the basic premise of your mind."

"If so, I did not know it," murmured the monk.

"How ridiculous can you get? Why, even your Church no longer insists upon the medieval conception of literal flames. Still, I don't know. From what I see of most people, they ought to fry. I'd like to be supervisor of the furnaces; there are some I've met in my short life whose fat egotism I'd like to burn right out of them. . . ."

Ralloux said, incredulously, "*You* resent egotists?"

Carmody, clean and dressed, grinned and started downstairs.

The mess, Mrs. Kri announced, was cleaned up and now she was going down into the vault to Sleep. She would leave the house open for their convenience, she said, but she hoped that when she awoke she wouldn't find everything too dirty, that they would wipe their feet before they came in and would empty the ashtrays and wash their dishes. Then she insisted upon giving each of them a peace-kiss, and broke down and cried, saying she might never see any of them again, and she asked Skelder's forgiveness for her attack upon him. He was quite gracious about it and gave her his blessing.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Kri, having injected herself with the necessary hibernatives, slammed the big iron door of the basement vault and locked herself in.

Tand bade them goodby. "If I'm caught before I get to my own vault, I'll have to go through the Night, willy-nilly. And once started, there's no holding back. It's all black and

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white then; you either get through or you don't. At the end of the seventh day, you are god, corpse, or monster."

"And what do you do with the monsters?" asked Carmody.

"Nothing, if they're harmless, like Mrs. Kri's husband. Otherwise, we kill them."

After a few more remarks, he shook hands, knowing this was an Earth custom, wishing them, not luck, but a suitable reward. He said goodby to Carmody last, holding his hand the longest and looking into his eyes. "This is your last chance ever to become anything. If the Night does not break up the frozen deeps of your soul, if you remain iceberg from top to bottom, as you now are, then you are done for. If there exists the least spark of warmth, of humanity, then let it burst into flame and consume you, no matter what the pain. The god Yess once said that if you would gain your life you must lose it. Nothing original in it—other gods, other prophets, everywhere there are sentient beings, have said so. But it is true in many ways, unimaginable ways."

As soon as Tand had left, the three Earthmen silently walked upstairs and took from a large trunk three helmets, each with a small box on its top, from which nodded a long antenna. These they put over their heads, then turned a dial just above the right ear.

Skelder smacked his thin lips doubtfully and said, "I certainly hope the scientists at Jung were correct in their theory. They said that the moment an electromagnetic wave is detected by this device, it will set up a canceling wave; that no matter how vast the energies of the magnetic storm, we will be able to walk through them unaffected."

"I hope so," said Ralloux, looking downcast. "I see now that in thinking I could conquer what better men than I have found invincible, I was committing the worst sin of all, that of spiritual pride. May God forgive me. I thank Him for these helmets."

"I thank Him, too," said Skelder, "though I think that we should not have to have recourse to them. We two should put our full trust in Him and bare our heads, and our souls, to the evil forces of this heathen planet."

Carmody smiled cynically. "There is nothing holding you back. Go ahead. You might earn yourself a halo."

"I have my orders from my superiors," Skelder replied stiffly.

Ralloux rose and began pacing back and forth. "I don't understand it. How could magnetic storms, even if of unparalleled violence, excite the atomic nuclei of beings on a planet eighty million miles away, and at the same time probe and stir the unconscious mind, cause it to fasten an iron grip upon the conscious, provoke inconceivable psychosomatic changes. The sun turns violet, extends its invisible wand, rouses the

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image of the beast that lives in the dark caves of our minds, or else wakens the sleeping golden god. Well, I can understand some of that. Changes in electromagnetic frequencies on Earth's sun not only influence our climate and weather, they control human behavior. But how could this star act upon flesh and blood so that skin tension lessens, bones grow soft, bend, harden into alien shapes that are not found in the genes . . . ?"

"We still don't know enough about genes to say what shapes are implicit in them," interrupted Carmody. "When I was a medical student at Hopkins, I saw some very strange things." He fell silent, thinking about those days.

Skelder sat upright and thinlipped on a chair, his helmet making him look more like a soldier than a monk.

"It won't be long," said Ralloux, still pacing, "before the Night will start. If what Tand says is true, the first twenty hours or so will put everybody who has stayed up—except us, who are protected by our helmets—into a deep coma. Seemingly, the bodies of the sleepers then build up a partial resistance so that they later wake up. Once awakened, they are so charged with energy or some sort of drive, that they cannot sleep until the sun is over its violent phase. It is while they are sleeping that we—"

"—shall do our dirty work!" said Carmody joyfully.

Skelder rose. "I protest! We are here on a scientific investigation, and we are allied with you only because there is certain work that we—"

"—don't want to soil our lily-white hands with," said Carmody.

At that moment the light in the room became dark, a heavy violet. There was dizziness, then a fading away of the senses. But it lasted only a second, though long enough to weaken their knees and send them crashing to the floor.

Carmody got up shakily on all fours, shook his head like a dog struck by a club, and said, "Wow, what a jolt that was! Good thing we had these helmets. They seem to have pulled us through."

He rose to his feet, his muscles aching and stiff. The room seemed to be hung with many violet veils, it was so dark and silent.

"Say, Ralloux, what's the matter with you?" he said.

Ralloux, white as a ghost, his face twisted with agony, leaped to his feet, screamed, tore the helmet off his head, and ran out the door. His footsteps could be heard pounding down the hall, down the steps. And the front door banged hard.

Carmody turned to the other monk. "He . . . now what's the matter with you?"

Skelder's mouth was open and he was staring at the clock on the wall. Suddenly, he whirled on Carmody. "Get away from me," he snarled.

Carmody blinked, then smiled and said, "Sure, why not? I never

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thought you had the skin I loved to touch, anyway."

He watched amusedly as Skelder began to edge along the wall towards the door. "Why are you limping?"

Skelder replied with an obscenity that set back even Carmody for a moment. "If I could do that," he replied, "I'd be ye compleat closed feedback. Why, what's happened to St. Skelder?"

The monk did not reply but walked crabwise from the room. A moment later the front door banged again. Carmody, quite alone, stood a moment in thought, then examined the clock at which the monk had been staring. Like most Kareenian timepieces, it told the time of the day, the day, month, and year. The attack of violet had taken place at 17:25. It was now 17:30.

Five minutes had elapsed.

Plus twenty-four hours.

III

"No wonder my every muscle aches! And I'm so hungry!" Carmody said aloud. He took the helmet off and dropped it on the floor.

"Well, that's that. Noble experiment." He went downstairs into the kitchen, half-expecting to be struck in the face with more blood. But there was nothing untoward. Whistling to himself, he took food and milk from the refrigerator, made himself sandwiches, ate heartily, then checked the action of his gun. Satisfied, he rose and walked towards the front door.

The telephone rang.

He hesitated, then decided to answer it. Wothehell, he said to himself. *Toujours gai.*

He lifted the receiver. "Hello!"

"John!" said a lovely female voice.

His head jerked away as if the receiver were a snake.

"John?" repeated the voice, now sounding far away, ghostly.

He sucked in a deep breath, squared his shoulders, resolutely put the phone to his ear again.

"John Carmody speaking. Who is this?"

There was no answer.

Slowly, he put the phone back on the hook.

When he left the house, he found himself in a darkness lit only by the streetlamps, islanded at hundred feet intervals, and by the huge moon, hanging dim and violet and malevolent above the horizon. The sky was clear, but the stars seemed far away, blobs straining to pierce the purplish haze. The buildings were like icebergs looming in a fog, threatening with their suddenness, seeming about to topple over. Only when he got close to them did they crystallize into stability.

The city lay silent. No bark of dog, no shrill of nighthawk, no toot of horn, no coughing, no slamming of door, no hard heels ringing on the sidewalk, no shout of laughter. If sight was muffled, sound was dead.

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Carmody hesitated, wondering if he shouldn't commandeer a car he'd found parked by the curb. Four miles to the temple was a long walk when you thought about what might be roaming the violet-hazed darkness. Not that he was scared, but he didn't care for unnecessary obstacles. A car would give him speed for a getaway; on the other hand, it was much more noticeable.

Deciding he would ride it for the first two miles, then walk, he opened the door. He recoiled, and his hand grabbed for his gun. But it dropped. The occupant, lying face up on the seat, was dead. Carmody's flashlight, briefly turned upon the man's face, showed a mass of dried sores. Apparently, the driver had either been one who'd taken the Chance or else put off too long going to Sleep. Something, maybe an explosion of cancer, had eaten him up, had even devoured the eyeballs and gulped away half of his nose.

Carmody pulled the body out and let it lie in the street. It took several minutes to get the water in the boiler heated up, then he drove off slowly, the headlights extinguished. As he cruised along, peering from side to side for strangers, keeping close to the curb on his left so he'd have contact with something solid, he kept thinking about the voice over the phone, trying to analyze how this thing could have come about.

To begin with, he thought, he must accept absolutely that he, John Carmody, through the power of his mind, out of the thin air, was creating something solid and objective. At least, he was the transmitter of energy. He didn't think his own body contained nearly enough power for the transmutation of energy into matter; if his own cells had to furnish it, they would burn up before the process was barely begun. Therefore, he must be, not the engine, but the transmitter, the transformer. The sun was supplying the energy; he, the blueprint.

Granted. So, if something he couldn't control—what a hateful but not to be denied thought!—if something he couldn't control was refashioning his dead wife, he at least was the engineer, the sculptor. What she was depended on him.

He didn't understand how it worked. Reconstructing a human body was a process a billion times more complex than fashioning a statue. A statue was all stone, from human-seeming surface to its rocky heart. But a living being required, literally, the knowledge of a god or the totality of a universe to construct. He, John Carmody, having been just about to get his M.D. when he'd killed Mary, had considerable knowledge of cell structure and of its electrochemical contents. But he didn't have enough for what was taking place. No one did, not even the great Doctor Zangrets, who had created the brain of the Boojum and who had recently announced the creation in his laboratory of self-

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reproducing starfish, the next step to be a more complex mollusc with an octopus's eye and with male and female organs. But this would take him and fifty assistants ten years and twenty million dollars to complete. And John Carmody was playing god in the space of a few minutes, apparently charge-free. Or, he thought, perhaps on credit.

The only explanation he could find was that this process somehow utilized, not his conscious knowledge of the human body, but his body's unconscious self-knowledge. Through some means, his cells reproduced themselves directly in Mary's newly born body. Were the cells in her body, then, mirror-images, as the cells of one twin were to the other's?

That he could understand. But what about those organs that were peculiarly female? It was true that his memory contained a minute file on interior female anatomy. He'd dissected enough corpses; and as far as her own particular organs went, he knew those well enough, having taken her apart quite scientifically and carefully before feeding the pieces to the garbage disposal. He had even examined the four-months embryo, the prime cause of his anger and revulsion towards her, the swelling thing within her that was turning her from the most beautiful creature in the world to a huge-bellied monster, that would inevitably demand at least a small share of her love for John Carmody. Even a little bit was too much; he possessed the most precious, exquisite, absolutely unflawed thing of beauty; she was his, nobody else's.

And then, when he had proposed that they get rid of this flawing growth, and she had said no, and he had insisted, and had tried to force her, and she had fought him, then she had cried that she did not love him as she once had, that this child was not even his but that of a man who was a *man*, not a monster of egotism; then, for the first time in his life, as far as he remembered, he had been angry. Angry was an understatement. He had completely lost himself, had, literally, seen red, thought red, drowned in a crimson flood.

Well, that was the first, and last, time. He was here because of that time. Or was he? Even if he'd not gone insane with passion, wouldn't he have killed her anyway, later on, simply because logic would demand it? And simply because he could not stand the idea of the most beautiful being in the universe soiled and swollen, monstrous . . .

Maybe. It didn't matter what might have happened. What did happen was the only thing for a realist to consider.

There was the matter of her cells, which should be female but would not be if they were mirror-images of his. And there was the matter of her brain. Even if her body could be created female because of his knowledge of organs and of struc-

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ture of genes, the brain would not be Mary's. Its original shaping, plus the billions of sub-microscopic groovings her memories would make, these would be beyond his power, conscious or unconscious.

No, if she had a brain, and she must have, then it would be his, John Carmody's brain. And if his, then it must contain his memories, his attitudes. It would be bewildered at finding itself in Mary's body, would not know what to do, to think. But, being John Carmody, it would find a way to make the most of the situation.

He laughed at the thought. Why didn't he find her? He would then have the perfect woman, her flawless beauty plus his mind, which would agree absolutely with him. Sublime self-abuse.

Again he laughed. Mary had used that term herself in that last blazing moment before he went completely under. She had said that to him she was not a woman, a wife, but merely a superior instrument for making love to himself. She had never had that glorious feeling of being one flesh that should rightfully come to a loving and passionate wife, no, she had always felt alone. And she had had to go to another man, and then she had never really experienced the wonder of the two-made-one because she knew all the time that she was sinning and would have to cleanse herself through confession and repentance. Even that rightful sensation was spoiled for her. Nevertheless, she had felt more like a wife and a woman with this man than with her own husband.

Well, as he'd said, that was that. Dismiss the past. Think of the thing that looks like Mary.

(He was glad that this thing was taking place outside him, not in him, as it did with the others. Perhaps he did have a frozen soul, but if so, it was good to have one. The iciness repelled subjectivity, made the unconscious happen outside him, and he could deal with that, with a host of Marys, whereas he'd have been helpless if he'd been like that epileptic girl or Mrs. Kri's husband or the cancer-devoured owner of this car.)

Think of the thing that looks like Mary.

If she—it—was conceived out of your head, like Athena from Zeus's —then at the moment of birth she had, as far as you know, your mind. But from that moment on, she becomes an independent being, one with thoughts and motivations of her own. Now, John Carmody, if you somehow found yourself dispossessed of your native body, lodged in the flesh of a woman you had murdered, and knew at the same time that the other *you* was in your first body, what would you do?

"I" he said, murmuring to himself, "would accept at once the fact that I was where I was, that I could not get out. I would define the limitations I had to work within, and would then set to work. And what

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would I do? What would I want? I would want to get off Dante's Joy and go to Earth or some Federation planet, where I could easily find myself a rich husband, could insist on being his number one wife. Why not? I'd be the most beautiful woman in the world."

He chuckled at that thought. More than once he'd imagined himself as a woman, wondering what it would really be like, envious as far as it was possible for him to envy, because a lovely woman with his brain would have the universe by the tail, as tight a hold as you could get on the tail of this wildly bucking universe.

He'd—

And then his hands tightened on the steering wheel and he sat up straight as if the new idea had been a hot poker rammed into him.

"Why didn't I think of that sooner?" he said loudly. "My God, if she and I can come to some arrangement—and even if we can't, I'll find some way of forcing her—why, why, she is the perfect alibi! I never did confess that I killed her, not to the authorities, anyway. And they never found the slightest trace of her. So, if I come back to Earth with her and say, 'Gentlemen, here is my wife. It's as I told you, she'd disappeared, and it turns out that she had an accident, was hit on the head, lost her memory, and somehow found her way to Dante's Joy . . . well, sure it sounds like a romantic novel, but remember such a thing does happen every now and then. What, you don't believe it? Well, gentlemen, take her fingerprints, photograph the pattern of blood vessels in her retina, type her blood, give her an EEG . . . Ah . . . !'"

Ah, but wouldn't all those identification marks be John Carmody's if her cells were mirror-images of his? Possibly. But there was also the chance that she might have her own. He had seen the photographs of all of them, more than once, and while he couldn't consciously reproduce them, it might be that his unconscious, which presumably held an exact file of them, would have reconstructed them in this Mary-thing.

But the EEG. If that gray pulse in her skull were his . . .

Well, sometimes the pattern did change if the brain had been injured, and that disconcerting feature might be the thing to verify her story. But what about the zeta wave? That would indicate she was a male, and one glance from the authorities or anybody else would be enough to disprove that. Their next step would be to hold her for examination. The only time the zeta wave changed its rhythm from female to masculine or vice versa was when the subject changed sex. And examination would show that she was female, that her hormones were predominantly female. Or would it? If her cells were mirror-images of his, then the genes would be masculine, and perhaps the hormones, too. And what about an internal search? Would it expose female organs or

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would she internally be his duplicate?

For a second he was downcast, but his racing brain seized upon another alibi. Of course! She'd been on Dante's Joy during the seven days of the Chance, hadn't she? And that meant that she would probably undergo some strange change, didn't it? So, the discrepancies turned up in the laboratory, the brain waves, the hormones, even the contradictory internal organs, all these would be the result of her taking the Chance. She might attract considerable publicity, and she'd have to have a definite, unshakable story, but if she had his rigid will and iron nerves (and she would), then she'd stick it through and would demand her rights as a citizen of the Federation, and however reluctant, they'd have to allow her her freedom. After that, what a team she and John Carmody would make!

If she were inclined to be cooperative, though, why hadn't she kept her telephone contact with him, arranged to meet him? If she had his brain, wouldn't she have thought of the same thing he had?

He frowned and whistled softly through his teeth. There was always one possibility he couldn't afford to ignore, even if he didn't like it. Perhaps she was *not* a female John Carmody.

Perhaps she *was* Mary.

He'd have to find out when he met her. In the meantime, his original plans were changed only slightly, to adjust to the realities of the situation. The gun in his coat pocket would still be used to give him the original, the unique, thrill he had promised himself.

At this moment he dimly saw, through the purplish halo cast by a streetlamp, a man and a woman. The woman was clothed, but the man was nude. They were locked in each other's arms, the woman leaning against the iron pillar of the lamp, forced back by the man's passionate strength. Forced? She was cooperating to the full.

Carmody laughed.

At that harsh sound, slapping the heavy silence of the night across the face, the man jerked his head upwards, gazed wide-eyed at the Earthman.

It was Skelder, but a Skelder scarcely recognizable. The long features seemed to have become even more elongated, the shaven skull had sprouted a light fuzz that looked golden even in this dark light, and the body, which had shed the monkish robes, showed a monstrous deformity of leg, a crookedness halfway between a man's limb and an animal's. Almost it was as if the bones had become flaccid and during the softness the legs had begun growing backwards. The naked feet themselves were extended from the legs so that he walked on tiptoe, like a ballerina, and they seemed to be covered with a light yellow shell that glistened like a hoof.

"The goat's foot!" said Carmody

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loudly, unable to restrain his delight.

Skelder loosed the woman and turned completely towards Carmody, revealing in his face the definitely caprine lines and in his body the satyr's abnormal yet fascinating repulsiveness.

Carmody threw back his head to laugh again, but stopped, his mouth open, suddenly choking.

The woman was Mary.

While he stared at her, paralyzed, she smiled at him, waved her hand gaily, then took Skelder's hand and started to walk off into the darkness with him, her hips swaying exaggeratedly in the age-old streetwalker's rhythm. The effect was, or would have been in other circumstances, half-comical, because of the six-months fat around waist and buttocks.

At the same time, Carmody was struck with a feeling he'd never had before, a melting heart-beating-wildly sensation directed towards Skelder, mixed with a cold laughter at himself. He felt a terrible invincible longing for the monstrous priest but knew also that he was standing off to one corner and laughing sneeringly at himself. And underneath this was a slowly rising tide, threatening to overwhelm in time the other feelings, a not-to-be denied lust for Mary, tinged with a horror at himself for that lust and the strangeness of being ripped apart.

Against this host of invaders there was but one defense, and he took it immediately, springing out of the car, running around the hood, raising his gun, firing through the red mist that had replaced the purple.

Skelder, whinnying, threw himself to the ground and rolled over and over, a long bundle of gray-white laundry in the uncertain light, blown by the winds of desperation, disappearing in the darkness of the shadow of a tremendous flying buttress.

Mary whirled around, her open mouth a dark O in her pale face, her hands white birds imploring for mercy, then she dropped heavily.

And John Carmody staggered as he was struck one heavy blow after another in the chest and the stomach, felt his heart and viscera blasted apart, felt himself falling, falling, blood cascading all over him, falling into a darkness.

Someone had suddenly opened fire upon him, he thought, and this was the end and goodby and good riddance and the universe had the last laugh. . . .

And then he found he was awake, on his back, thinking these thoughts, staring straight up at the purple glove of the moon, a monstrous gauntlet flung into the sky by a monstrous knight. Come on, Sir John Carmody, fat little man clad in thinskinned armor, enter the lists.

"Always game," he muttered to himself and rose unsteadily to his feet, his hands going unbelievingly over his body, groping for the great holes that he could have sworn were there. But they weren't; the flesh was unbroken, and his clothes were

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innocent of blood. Wet, yes, but with his sweat.

So that is how it is to die, he thought. It is horrible because it makes you feel so helpless, like a baby in the grip of an adult squeezing the life out of you, not because it hates you but because it must kill in the order of things, and squeezing is the only way it knows to carry out its order.

Stupefied at first, he was beginning to think clearly now. Obviously, those strange to-be-avoided-at-all-costs-even-to-losing-one's-temper sensations were those felt by Skelder and the Mary-thing, and the impact of the bullets tearing into her body had somehow been communicated to him, the shock so great that he'd lost consciousness or else his body had for that moment been fooled into thinking it was dead.

What if it had insisted on thinking so? Then he'd really be dead, wouldn't he?

Well, what of it?

"Don't fool yourself, Carmody," he said. "Whatever you do, don't fool yourself. You felt scared . . . to death. You called out for somebody to help you. Who? Mary? I don't think so, though it may have been. My mother? But her name is Mary. Well, it doesn't matter; the thing is that *I*, this thing up here," he said, tapping his skull, "was not responsible, it was John Carmody the child calling out, the youngster buried in me that used to cry for Mommy, in vain, because Mommy was usually out somewhere, working, or out with some man, anyway, always out, and I, I was alone and she wouldn't have come except to tell me what a little monster I was. . . ."

He walked over to Mary and turned her over.

"You won't bother me any more. It is too bad this had to happen, Mary, because we could have gone back to Earth, scot-free."

A cry from the darkness made him jump. He whirled, his gun ready, but saw no one. "Skelder?" he called.

For answer he got another terrible cry, more like an animal's than a man's.

The street ran straight for a hundred yards ahead of him, then turned at a right angle. On the corner was a tall building, each of whose six stories overhung the one beneath, making it look like a telescope whose small end was stuck in the ground. Out of its shadows dashed Ralloux, his face twisted in agony. Seeing Carmody, he slowed to a walk.

"Stand to one side, John!" he cried. "You don't have to be in it, even if I do. Get out of it! I will take your place! I want to be in it! There's room for only one, and that space is reserved for me!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" growled Carmody. Warily, he kept his automatic pointed at the monk. No telling what maneuver this chaotic talk was supposed to cover up.

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"Hell! I am talking about Hell. Don't you see that flame, feel it? It burns me when I am in it, and it burns others when I am not in it. Stand to one side, John, and let me relieve you of its pain. It will hold still long enough to consume me entirely, then, as I begin to adjust myself to it, it runs off and I must chase it down, because it settles around some other tortured soul and will not leave him unless I offer to dive into it again. And I do, no matter what the pain."

"You really are crazy," said Carmody. "You—"

And then he was screaming, had flung away his gun, was beating at his clothes, was rolling on the ground.

Just as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. He sat up, shaking, sobbing uncontrollably.

"God, I thought I was on fire!"

Ralloux had stepped forward onto the space occupied by Carmody and was standing there with his fists clenched and his eyes roaming desperately as if looking for some escape from his invisible prison. But seeing Carmody walking towards him, he fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Carmody, nobody deserves this, no matter how wicked! Not even you!"

"That's nice," replied Carmody, but there was little of the old mocking tone in his voice. He knew now *what* the monk was suffering from. It was the *how* that bothered him. *How* could Ralloux project a subjective hallucination into another person, and make that person feel it as intensely as he did? The only thing he could think of was that the sun's curious action developed enormously in certain persons their ESP powers, or, if he discounted that, that it could transmit the neural activities of one person to another without direct contact. No mystery in that, certainly; it was within the known limitations of the universe. Radio transmitted sound, in a manner of speaking, just as TV did pictures; what you heard wasn't the original person, but the effect was the same, or just as good. However this was done, it was effective. He remembered now how he had felt in himself the bullets smashing into Mary, and had experienced the terror of death—whether it was his terror or Mary's didn't matter, and . . . would everybody he met during the seven nights transmit to him their feelings, and he be helpless to resist them?

No, not helpless; he could kill the authors of the emotions, the generators and broadcasters of this power.

"Carmody," shouted Ralloux, seemingly trying by the loudness of his voice to deafen the pain of the fire, "Carmody, you must understand that I do not have to stand in this flame. No, the flame does not follow me, I follow it and will not allow it to escape. I *want* to be in hell.

"But you must not understand by that that I have lost my faith, have rejected my religion, and therefore

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have been flung headlong into the place where the flames are. No, I believe even more firmly in the teachings of the Church than before! I cannot disbelieve! But . . . I voluntarily have consigned myself to the flame, for I cannot believe that it is right to doom ninety-nine percent of God-created souls to hell. Or, if it is right, then I will be among the wrong.

"Believing absolutely every iota of the Creed, I still refuse to go to my rightful place among the blest, if such a place was ever reserved for me! No, Carmody, I range myself among the eternally damned, as a protest against divine injustice. If a fraction only are to be spared, or even if things were reversed, and ninety-nine point nine nine nine to the ninety-ninth place souls were to be saved, and one solitary soul were to have Hell all to itself, I should renounce Heaven and stand in the flames with that piteous soul, and I should say, 'Brother, you are not alone, for I am here with you to eternity or until God relents.' But you would not hear one word of blasphemy from me, nor one word of pleading for mercy. I should stand and burn until that one soul were freed of its torment and could go to join the ninety-nine point nine nine nine to the ninety-ninth place. I . . ."

"Raving mad," said Carmody, but he was not so sure. Though Ralloux's face was contorted in agony, the look of dissonance, the splitting effect, as of two warring forces, was gone. He now appeared, though in pain, to be at one with himself. Whatever it was that had seemed to tear him apart from within was gone.

Carmody could not think of what it was that could cause the cleavage to vanish, especially now when, under the circumstances, he would have thought it'd be even more stressed. Shrugging, he turned to walk back towards the car. Ralloux yelled something else, something warning yet at the same time entreating. The next second, Carmody felt that terrible searing heat at his back; his clothes seemed to smoke and his flesh gave a silent scream.

He whirled, firing his gun in the general direction of the monk, unable to see him because of the glare of flame.

Suddenly, the dazzling light and the scorching heat were whisked away. Carmody blinked, readjusting his eyes to the dim purple, looking for Ralloux's body, thinking that the hallucination must have died with the projector of it. But there was only one corpse, Mary's.

Down the street, something black-looking slipped around the corner. A scream drifted back. Ralloux in hot pursuit of his torture and justification.

"Let him go," said Carmody, "as long as he takes the flame with him." But, he thought, it was the flame that was dragging the monk after it.

Now, now that Mary was dead, was a good time to determine for

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himself something about which he'd wondered very much.

It took him a little time. He had to get out of the car's toolbox a hammer and a dull chisel-like instrument that was probably used to pry the hub-cap and the tire from the wheel. With these he managed to split her skull open. Putting the tools down, he picked up the flashlight and on his knees bent over close to the open cranium, holding his coat over him to give some cover for the beam. He pressed the light's button, shining it straight into the hole, his face close as possible to the brain. It was not, he knew, that he would be able to distinguish between a man's brain, his, and a woman's brain, Mary's. But he was curious to see if she did have a brain or if, perhaps, there was just a large knot of nerves, a nexus for the telepathic orders that he gave it. If her life and her behavior were somehow dependent upon the workings of his own unconscious, then . . .

The light sprang into being.

There was no brain that he could see. Just what it was he had no time then to determine, only time to see a coiled shape, glittering red eyes, a gaping white-fanged mouth, and then a blur as it struck.

He fell back, the light falling from his hand and rolling away, its beam shining out into the night. He didn't care or even think about it, for his face had begun puffing up at once. It was like a balloon, swelling as if air were being pumped into it at a very fast rate. And at the same time, an intense pain spread from it, ran down his neck and into his veins. Fire invaded his body, spreading through him as if his blood were turning into molten silver.

There was no running away from this flame, as there had been from Ralloux's.

He screamed again and again, leaped to his feet, and, half out of his mind, drove his heel in hysterical fury and pain against the snake whose fangs had bitten into his cheek and whose tail merged into the cluster of nerves at the base of Mary's spine, growing from it. It had been living coiled up in her skull, surely waiting for the time when John Carmody would open its bony nest. And it had released its deadly poison into the flesh of the man who had created it.

Not until the horrible thing had been crushed beneath his heel, smashed into a blob from which two long curved broken fangs still stuck out, did Carmody cease. Then he fell to the ground beside Mary, the tissue of his body seeming like dry wood that had burst into flame, and the terror of dissolving forever wrenching a choked cry from a throat that had seemed too full of a roaring fear to utter ever again. . . .

There was one thought, the only shape in the chaos, the only cool thing in the fire. He had killed himself.

Somewhere in the moon-tinged purple mist a bell was ringing.

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Far off, the referee was chanting slowly, "*. . . five, six, seven . . .*"

Somebody in the crowd—Mary?—was screaming, "Get up, Johnny, get up! You've got to win, Johnny boy, get up, knock that big brute down! Don't let him count you out, Joh-oh-oh-oh-neeee!"

"Eight!"

John Carmody groaned, sat up and tried, in vain, to get on his feet.

"Nine!"

The bell was still ringing. Why should he get up when he was saved by the bell?

But then why hadn't the ref quit counting?

What kind of a fight was this where the round wasn't over even if the bell did ring?

Or was it announcing the opening of a new round, not the closing of an old?

"Gotta get up. Fight. Whale hell outa that big bastard," he muttered.

"Nine" still hung in the air, as if it had jelled in the mist and was glowing there, faintly, violently phosphorescent.

Who was he fighting? he asked, and he rose, shakily, his eyes opening for the first time, his body crouching, his left fist sticking out, probing, his chin behind his left shoulder, his right hand held cocked, the right that had once won him the welterweight championship.

But there was no one there to fight. No referee. No crowd. No Mary screaming encouragement. Only himself.

Somewhere, though, there *was* a bell ringing.

"Telephone," he muttered, and looked around. The sound came from the massive granite public phone booth half a block away. Automatically, he began walking towards it, noticing at the same time what a headache he had and how stiff his muscles were and how his guts writhed uneasily within him, like sleepy snakes being awakened by the heat of the morning sun.

He lifted the receiver. "Hello," he said, at the same time wondering why he was answering, knowing that it couldn't possibly be for him.

"John?" said Mary's voice.

IV

The receiver fell, swung, then it and the phone box erupted into many fragments as Carmody emptied a clip at them. Pieces of the red plastic struck him in the face, and blood, real blood, his, trickled down his cheeks and dripped off his chin and made warm channels down the sides of his neck.

Stiffly, almost falling, he ran away, reloading his gun but saying over and over, "You stupid fool, you might have blinded yourself, killed yourself, stupid fool, stupid fool. To lose your head like that."

Suddenly, he stopped, put the gun back into his pocket, took out a handkerchief, and wiped the blood off his face. The wounds, though many, were only surface-deep. And

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his face was no longer swollen.

Not until then did he perceive the full significance of the voice.

"Holy Mother of God!" he moaned.

Even in his distress, one part of him stood off, cool observer, and commented that he'd not sworn since childhood, but now he was on Dante's Joy he seemed to be doing it at every turn. He had long ago given up using any blasphemous terms because, in the first place, almost everybody did, and he didn't want to be like everybody, and, in the second place, if you blasphemed, you showed you believed in what you were blaspheming against, and he certainly didn't believe.

The cool observer said, "Come on, John, get a grip on yourself. You're letting this shake you. We don't let anything shake us, do you?"

He tried to laugh, but succeeded only in bringing out a croak, and it sounded so horrible that he quit.

"But I killed her," he whispered to himself.

"Twice," he said.

He straightened up, put his hand in his pocket, gripped the gun's butt tightly. "OK, OK, so she can come back to life, so I'm responsible for it, too. So what? She can be killed, again and again, and when the seven nights are up, then she's done forever, and I'll be rid of her forever. So, if I have to litter this city from one end to the other with her corpses, I'll do it. Of course, there'll be a tremendous stink afterwards"—he managed a feeble laugh—"but I won't have to clean up the mess, let the garbage department do that."

He went back to the car but decided first to look at the old body of Mary.

There were huge pools of black blood on the pavement and bloody footprints leading off into the night, but the dead woman was gone.

"Well, why not?" he whispered to himself. "If your mind can produce flesh and blood and bone from the thin air, why can't it even more easily repair blasted flesh and blood and bone and re-spark the dead body? After all, that's the Principle of Least Resistance, the economy of Nature, Occam's razor, the Law of Minimum Effort. No miracles in this, John, old partner. And everything's taking place outside you, John. The inner you is secure, unchanged."

He got into the car and drove on. Because the night seemed a little brighter, he drove a little faster. His mind, too, seemed to be coming out of the slowness induced in it by the recent shocks, and he was thinking with his former quick fluidity.

"I say, 'Arise from the dead,' and they arise," he said, "like Jairus' daughter. *Talitha cumi.* Am I not a god? If I could do this on some other planet, I would *be* a god. But here," he added, chuckling with some of his old vigor, "here I am just a bum, one of the boys, prowling the night with the other monsters."

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He passed the street corner on which stood the statue of Ban Dremon, a great man of Kareena, but dead these hundred years. From the statue to the Temple of Boonta was a straight mile and a half. Normally, he'd have been able to see it clearly but now, despite the enormous globe of the moon, halfway up the sky, he could discern the temple only as a bulk looming in the purple, hinting vaguely that it was formed of stone and not of shade, that it was itself the substance, not the shadow.

There was something lying on the road in his path. He steered the car around it, then stopped it and got out to look. The thing resembled a man, but there was a stiff and hard quality about it and its rigid limbs that aroused his curiosity.

It was the life-sized statue of Ban Dremon, tumbled from its pedestal.

He looked up at the pedestal. Ban Dremon—another one—stood there in what should have been an empty place.

"If curiosity killed the cat," he muttered, "I'd have been dead a million times."

He gripped the edge of the marble base, which was a foot above his head, and with one easy powerful graceful motion pulled himself up and then over. The next moment, gun in hand, he was eye to eye with the statue.

No statue. A man, a native.

He was in the same attitude as the dislodged Ban Dremon, the right arm held out in salute, the left holding a baton, the mouth open as if to give a command.

Carmody touched the skin of the face, so much darker than the normal Kareenian's, yet not so dark as the bronze of the statue.

It was hard, smooth and cold. If it was not metal, it would pass for it. As near as he could determine in the uncertain light, the eyeballs had lost their light color. He pressed his thumbs in on them and found that they resisted like bronze. But when he stuck his finger in the open mouth, he felt the back part of the tongue give a little, as if the flesh beneath the metallic covering were still soft. The mouth, however, was dry as any statue's.

Now how, he thought, could a man turn his protoplasm, which had only a very minute trace of copper and, as far as he remembered, no tin, into a solid alloy? Even if those elements were present in large enough quantities to form bronze, what of the heat needed?

The only explanation he could think of was that the sun was furnishing the energy and the human body was furnishing the blueprints and, somehow, the machinery necessary. The psyche had free scope during the seven nights of the Chance; it utilized, however unconsciously, forces that must exist at all times around it but of which it had no knowledge.

If that were so, he thought, then man must be, potentially, a god. Or if god was a term too strong, then he

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must be a titan. A rather stupid titan, however, blind, a Cyclops with a cataract.

Why couldn't a man have this power at other times than the Night? This vast power to bend the universe to *his* will? Nothing would be impossible, nothing. A man could move from one planet to the next without a spaceship, could step from the Avenue of the Temple of Boonta on Dante's Joy some 10,000 light-years to Broadway in Manhattan on Earth. Could become anything, do anything, perhaps hurl suns through space as easily as a boy hurled a baseball. Space and time and matter would no longer be walls, would be doorways to step through.

A man could become anything. He could become a tree, like Mrs. Kri's husband. Or, like this man, a statue of bronze, somehow digging with invisible hands into the deep earth, abstracting minerals, fusing them without the aid of furnace walls and heat, with no knowledge of chemical composition, and depositing them directly in his cells without killing himself at once.

There was one drawback. Eventually, having gotten what he wanted, he would die. Though able to bring about the miracle of metamorphosis, he could not bring about the miracle of living on.

This half-statue would die, just as Skelder would die when his insane lust swelled that monstrous member which he'd grown to complete his lust, swelled it until it became larger than he and he, now its appendage, would find himself immobile, unable to do anything but feed himself and it and wear his heart out trying to pump enough blood to keep himself, and it, the parasite grown larger than the host, alive. He would die, just as Ralloux would die in the heat of an imagined flame of hell. They would all die unless they reversed the leap of mind and flow of flesh that hurtled them into such rich sea-changes.

And what, he thought, what about you, John Carmody? Is Mary what you want? Why should you? And what harm can her resurrection do to you? The others are obviously suffering, doomed, but you can see no doom to you in yourself giving birth to Mary again, no suffering. Why are you an exception?

I am John Carmody, he whispered. *Always have been, am, will be an exception.*

From behind and below him came a loud roar like a lion's. Men shouted. Another roar. A snarling. A man screamed as if in a death agony. Another roar. Then a strange sound as if a great bag had burst. Vaguely, Carmody felt that his ankles were wet.

He looked around in surprise and saw that the moon had gone down and the sun had risen. What had he been doing all night? Standing here on this pedestal dreaming away the purple hours.

He blinked and shook his head. He had allowed himself to be caught

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up in the bronze thoughts of this statue, had felt as it did, had slowed time and let it lap around him gently and dreamily, just as he had experienced the hard scarlet lust of Skelder, Mary's meltingness and liquid movements toward the satyr-priest, the impact of bullets tearing into her, her terror of death, of dissolvingness, and Ralloux's agony of flesh in his sheet of flame and agony of soul over man's damnation—just as he had felt all these, so now he had fallen prey to this creature's mineral philosophy. And might perhaps have ended as it had if something had not jarred him out of the fatal contemplation. Even now, coming out of his—coma?—he felt the temptation of the silent peace, of letting time and space flow by you, sweetly and softly.

But in the next second he came fully awake. He had tried to move away and found that he was anchored more than mentally. The finger he'd put into the statue's mouth was clamped tight between its teeth. No matter how violently he pulled away, he could not get it loose. There was no pain at all, only a numbness. This, he supposed, was because the circulation was cut off. Still, there should be some pain. If this sharing of thoughts had gone so far that his own flesh had changed . . .

The man-statue must not have been completely transformed; there must have been feeling left in the soft back part of the tongue. Reacting automatically—or maybe maliciously—it had slowly closed its jaws during the night, and when the sun saw the process of casting flesh into bronze complete, its jaws were almost shut. Now they would never open, for the soul within it was gone. Or, at least, Carmody could detect no thoughts or feeling emanating from it.

He looked around him, anxious not only because he did not know yet how to get free of this trap but because of his exposed position. What made things worse was that he'd dropped the gun. It lay at his feet, but, though he bent his knees and reached down for it with his left hand, his fingertips were several inches away.

Straightening up, he allowed himself the luxury of a firecracker-string of curses. It was ridiculous, this verbal explosion, of no practical use whatever. But he certainly felt a little less tense.

He looked up and down the street. Nobody in sight.

He looked down, remembering then that he'd had the impression his legs had been wetted during the night. Dried blood caked his sandals and stained the green and white stripes of his fashionably painted legs.

He muttered, "Oh, no, not again," thinking of the shower of blood in Mrs. Kri's kitchen. But a further examination showed him that Mary was not responsible. The stuff had spurted from wounds made in the

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body of a monster, which lay at the base of the pedestal, face up, its dead eyes staring at the purplish sky. It was twice as tall as the average Kareenian and was covered with a bluish feathery hair. Apparently its body hairs, once no thicker than those of an Earthman, had sprouted into a dense mat. Its legs and feet had broadened, like an elephant's, to support its weight. From the hips grew a long thick tapering tail that would in time have resembled that of a tyrannosaurus rex. The hands had degenerated into talons, and the face had assumed a bestial angle, slanting out, the jawbones thickening, powered with great muscles, equipped with sharp teeth. These were fastened down on an arm that it had torn from some unlucky man, supposedly one of those who had killed it during the fight that must have taken place. But of the others there was no sign except great stains on the street and sidewalk.

Then suddenly six men walked around the corner and halted staring at him. Though they seemed unarmed, there was something in the concentration of their expressions that alarmed him. Violently he jerked upon his finger, again and again until, panting, sweating, he could only look into the rigid grin and fixed eyes of the statue and swear at it. Once, he thought, this thing was human and therefore could have been dealt with, being of weak flesh and blood. But now, dead and of unyielding, *uncaring* metal, it was past argument, past cunning words.

For the first time, he saw that it was not only his finger that had become bronze. His whole hand, and even a part of his wrist, had solidified.

He ground his teeth in silent agony, and he thought, *If they won't help me, and there's no reason why they should, then I must sacrifice my hand. That's logical; that is that if I want to get free again. It is possible to get my knife from my pocket and . . .*

One of the men said, mockingly, and as if he'd been reading Carmody's thoughts, "Go ahead, Earthman, cut it off! That is, if you can possibly endure to mutilate your precious flesh!"

For the first time, Carmody recognized the man as Tand.

He had no chance to reply, for the others began to jeer, making fun of his having been caught in such a ridiculous way, asking him if he always made a public spectacle of himself like this. They hooted and laughed and slapped their thighs and each other's backs in typically uninhibited Kareenian fashion.

"This is the pipsqueak who thought he would kill a god!" howled Tand. "Behold the great deicide, caught like any baby with his finger in the jam jar!"

Keep cool, Carmody, they can't touch you. Sticks and stones may break your bones, but . . .

That was a fine thing to say, and

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it meant exactly nothing. He was tired, tired, his proud bristling-forward-bearing gone with the strength that seemed to have drained from his body. If his hand did not hurt because it was of frozen metal, his feet certainly made up for it. They felt as if he'd been standing on them for days.

Suddenly he felt panic. How long had he been upon this pedestal? How much time had flowed by? How much time did he have left before the Night of Light was over!

"Tand," said one of the men, "do you honestly think that this would-be statue might have the power?"

"Look at what he has done so far," replied Tand. He spoke to Carmody: "You were a little late, friend. The god Yess gave up the ghost on the first day of the Chance. Before he died, he told me to find six others who would qualify as lovers of the Great Mother and fathers of the babe."

"So you lied to me!" snarled Carmody. "You weren't going to Sleep, then?"

"If you will recall my exact words," said Tand, "you will see that I did not lie. I told you the truth but ambiguously. You chose the particular interpretation."

"Friends," spoke another man, "I think we are wasting our time here and giving the Enemy an advantage we may not be able to overcome. This man, despite his tremendous power, which I can sense in him even without probing—this man, I say, is one of the dirty-souled. In fact, I doubt if he does have a soul. Or, if he does, it is such a fragment, a rag, a minuscule, a tiny little thing cowering in the deep and the darkness, afraid to have anything to do with the body, allowing the body to operate as it will, refusing to take any responsibility, refusing to admit even its own existence."

The others seemed to find this very funny, for they laughed uproariously and added remarks of their own.

Carmody trembled. Their amused contempt struck him like six hammers, one after the other, then all at once, then one after the other, like an anvil chorus. It was intensified many times because he shared in it at the same time that he felt its impact, as if he were both transmitter and receiver. He who had always thought he was *above* being affected by anyone's contempt or laughter had suddenly found that it was not altitude that protected him but a barrier built up *around* him. And the defense had crumbled.

Wearily, hopelessly, he began jerking on the finger, then, as he saw six other strangers walking down the street towards him, he gave up. These men were also unarmed and walked with the same proud bearing possessed by the other group. They, too, stopped before him but ignored the first-comers.

"Is this the man?" said one.

"This is the man," replied another.

"Should we release him?"

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"No. If he wishes to be one of us, he will release himself."

"But if he wishes to be one of *them* he will also release himself."

"Earthman," said a third, "you are being honored above all others—indeed you are the first man not born on this planet ever to be so honored."

"Come," said a fourth, "let us go to the Temple and there lie with Boonta and so father Algul, the true prince of this world."

Carmody began to feel less humiliated. Apparently, he was important, not only to the second group but to the first. Though, if the first wanted him for something, they had a strange way of enlisting him.

What made the procedure so peculiar was that no man in the two groups was distinguished by any conventional marks of good or evil. All were handsome, vigorous, and seemingly self-confident. The only difference in their bearing was that the first, those who spoke for Yess, seemed to be having a good time, and were not afraid to lose their dignity in laughter. The second were uniformly grave and somewhat stiff.

They must need me badly, he thought.

"What will you give me?" he said very loudly, encompassing both groups in one glance.

V

The men of the first group looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and Tand said, "We will give you nothing you can't give yourself."

The spokesman for the newcomers, a tall young man, almost too handsome, said, "When we go into the Temple and there lie with Boonta as the Dark Mother, and father Algul her Dark Son, you will experience an ecstasy that cannot be described because you have never felt anything like it before. And during the years that it will take the babe to grow into manhood and godhood, you will be one of his regents, and there will be nothing in this world denied you—"

"Even," broke in Tand, "the fear of these others killing you so they may not have to share any of the riches which they cannot possibly spend during their lifetime. For it is true that when the seven evil fathers triumph, they always plot against each other after Algul is born. They are forced to, because they cannot trust each other. And it has always happened that only one survives, and when Algul comes to manhood, he kills that one, because he cannot endure having a mortal father."

"What is to prevent Algul from being killed by one of his fathers?" asked Carmody.

Even in the violet light, he could see the men of the second group turn pale. They looked at each other. "Though he is a baby who must be fed and have his diapers changed, Algul is yet a god," said Tand. "That is, being a god, he is the sum and essence of the spirit of

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those who created him. And, as most men wish for immortality, he, representing them, is immortal. That is, he would live forever if his creators did, too. But, being evil, he cannot trust his fathers, and so they must die. And when they do, he begins to age and eventually dies. Though potentially immortal, he is dead the day he is born because the seeds of evil are in him, and the seeds flower into distrust and hate."

"This is all very fine," said Carmody. "Why, then, does Yess, the supposedly good god, also age and die?"

The men of Algul laughed, and their leader said, "Well spoken, Earthman."

Patiently, as if talking to a child, Tand replied, "Yess, though a god, is also a man, a being of flesh and blood. As such he is limited, and he works within the bounds set for flesh and blood. Like all men, he must die. Furthermore, he is the sum and essence of the predominating spirit of the people who lived at the time he was born—or created, whichever term you prefer. Those who Sleep have as much to do with the formation and tempering of his body and spirit as we seven Wakers do. The Sleepers dream, and the collective force of their dreaming decides which god shall be born during the Night, and also what his spirit—or what you call his personality—shall be. If the inclination of the people who Sleep has been towards evil during the years preceding the Night, then it is likely that Algul will be born. If towards good, then it is likely that Yess will be born. We would-be fathers are not actually the determining factors. We are the agents, and the Sleepers, the two billion people of our world, are the will."

Tand paused, stared hard at Carmody as if trying to impress his sincerity upon him, and said, "I will be frank. You are so important partly because you *are* an Earthman; a man from another star. Only lately have we Kareenians become very much aware of alien religions, of what their existence implies. We have become aware that the Great Mother, or God, or the Prime Cause, or whatever you wish to term the Creator of the universe, is not restricted in Her interest to our little cloud of dust, that She has scattered Her creatures everywhere.

"Therefore, the Sleepers, knowing that man is not alone, that he has blood-brothers everywhere that life may be, outwards to infinity and to eternity, wish to have as a father one of these strangers from the stars. Yess, reborn, will not be the old Yess. He will be as different from the old man who died, his predecessor, as any baby is from his father. He will be, we hope, part alien, because of his alien heritage. And during his princehood over us, he will enable us to understand and become one with these strangers from the stars, and we will be better men because of him and his heritage. That

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is one reason, Carmody; why we desire you."

Tand pointed at his Enemies.

"And these six want you also as seventh, but not for quite the same reason. If you are one of the fathers of Algul, then perhaps Algul may extend his dominion past this planet and to the stars. And they, through Algul, will share in this cosmic loot."

Carmody felt hope—and craving—surge within him, bringing him strength from somewhere in his exhausted flesh. To take for yourself the richest planets, as you would the biggest diamonds for a necklace! String them on a cord of space and wear them around your neck! With the vast powers he would undoubtedly have as Algul's regent, he could do anything! Nothing barred!

It was then that the second group must have decided that the right moment had come, for they suddenly launched at him the collective force of their feelings. And he, being wide open, reeled beneath them.

Dark, dark, dark . . .

Ecstasy . . .

He, John Carmody, would be forever John Carmody as he now knew him, inviolate, strong, defiant, bending or destroying anything in the way of what he wanted. No danger here of his changing, of becoming something other than what he now was. Body, mind, and soul, he would in the flame of this dark ecstasy become hard as a diamond, resisting all change, permanent, forever John Carmody. The race of man might die around him, suns grow cold, planets slow and fall into their parent suns, but he, John Carmody, would travel outwards with the expanding universe, landing upon freshly born planets, living there until they grew old and died, then setting out again. And always and forever himself, today and tomorrow, unchanging, the same hard-and-bright-as-a-diamond John Carmody.

Then the first group opened themselves up. But instead of launching at him their concentrated essence, like a spear, they merely lowered the wall and allowed him to attack or do whatever he wished. There was not the slightest hint of assault or force, nor the feeling the fathers of Algul gave of withholding something deep within themselves in reserve. They were wide open and transparent to the depths of their beings. Nothing withheld. Do with us what you may.

John Carmody could no more resist attacking than a hungry tiger who sees a goat tethered to a tree.

Light, light, light . . .

Ecstasy . . .

But not the hardening, setting-forever ecstasy of the others. This was threatening, frightening, for it exploded him, dissolved, sent him flying in a thousand bits outwards.

Screaming silently, in mental anguish, he tried to collect the hundred thousand fragments, to bring them back, fused again into the image of the old John Carmody. The

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pain of destroying himself was unendurable.

Pain? It was the same as the ecstasy. How could pain and ecstasy be the same thing?

He didn't know. All he did know was that he had recoiled from the seven of Yess. Their lack of walls was their defense. Not for anything would he again attack them. Destroy John Carmody?

"Yes," said Tand, though Carmody had not spoken. "You must die first; you must dissolve that image of the old John Carmody, and build a new image, a better one, just as the newly born Yess will be better than the old god who died."

Abruptly, Carmody turned from both groups and, reaching in his pocket, drew out the switchknife. His thumb pressed the button in the handle and the blade shot out like a blue-gray tongue, like the tongue of the snake that had bitten him.

There was but one way to get loose from the bronze jaws.

He did it.

It hurt, but not so badly as he thought it would. Nor did he bleed so much as he had expected. He mentally ordered the blood vessels at the end of the stump to close. And they, like flowers at the approach of night, obeyed.

But the work of sawing through flesh and bone left him panting as if he'd run a mile. His legs trembled, and the faces below him blurred, and ran into two broad white featureless faces. He couldn't last long.

The leader of the men of Algul stepped forward and held out his arms. "Jump, Carmody," he called joyfully. "Jump! I will catch you; my arms are strong. Then we will scatter this weak, sniveling brood, and go to the temple and there—"

"Wait!"

The woman's voice, coming from behind them, loud and commanding, yet at the same time musical, froze them.

He looked up, over the heads of the men.

Mary.

Mary, alive and whole again, as he had seen her before he emptied his gun into her face. Unchanged, except for one thing. Her belly was swollen enormously; it had grown since he had last seen her and was now ripe to give birth to the life within her.

The leader of the men of Algul said to Carmody, "Who is this Earthwoman?"

Carmody, standing on the edge of the base, ready to leap down, hesitated and opened his mouth to reply. But Tand spoke first.

"She is his wife. He killed her upon Earth and fled here. But he created her the first night of the Sleep."

"Ahhhh!"

The seven of Algul sucked in their breath and drew back.

Carmody blinked at them. Apparently, Tand's information held implications he didn't see.

"John," she said, "it is no use your

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murdering me again and again. I always rise. I always will. And I am ready to bear the child you did not want; he will be here within the hour. At dawn."

Quietly, but with a tremor in his voice that betrayed the great strain he felt, Tand said, "Well, Carmody, which shall it be?"

"Which?" said Carmody, sounding stupid even to himself. Automatically, he tried to rub his finger against his nose in the old nervous gesture, but drew the stump of his arm back just in time.

"Yes," said the leader of Algul, stepping back beneath the pedestal. "Which shall it be? Shall the baby be Yess or Algul?"

"So that is it!" said Carmody. "The economy of the Goddess, of Nature, of What-have-you. Why create a baby when one is at hand?"

"Yes," said Mary loudly, her voice still musical but demanding, like a bronze bell. "John, you do not want our baby to be as you were, do you? A frozen dark soul? You do want him to be of heat and light, don't you?"

"Man," said Tand, "don't you see that you have already chosen who the babe shall be? Don't you know that she has no brain of her own, that what she says is what you think, really think and truly desire in the depths of your soul? Don't you know that you are putting her words into her mouth, that her lips move as you direct them?"

Carmody almost fainted, but not from weakness and hunger of body.

Light, light, light . . . Fire, fire, fire . . . Let himself dissolve. Like the phoenix, he would rise again. . . .

"Catch me, Tand," he whispered.

"Jump," said Tand, laughing loudly. A roar of laughter and of cries that sounded like hallelujahs burst from the men of Yess.

But the men of Algul shouted in alarm and began running away in all directions.

At the same time the dark purplish haze began to grow lighter, to turn pale violet. Then, suddenly, the ball of fire was above the horizon, and the violet light was white again, as if someone had yanked aside a veil.

And those of the men of Algul who were still in sight staggered, fell to the ground, and died in the midst of convulsions that threw them from side to side and that broke their bones. For a time they thrashed like chickens with their heads cut off, then, bloody-mouthed, lay still.

"Had you chosen otherwise," said Tand, still embracing Carmody after his leap downwards, "we would be lying in the dust of the street."

They began walking towards the temple, forming a circle around Mary, who walked slowly and stopped now and then as the pains struck her. Carmody, walking behind her, gritted his teeth and moaned softly, for he too felt the pangs. He was not alone; the others were biting their lips and holding

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their hands tight upon their bellies.

"And what happens afterwards to her—to it?" he whispered to Tand. He whispered because, even if he knew that this Mary-thing was not self-conscious, was really manipulated by his thoughts—and now by those of the others, too—he had become suddenly sensitive to the feelings of other people. He did not want to take a chance on hurting her, even if such a thing did not seem possible.

"Her work will be done when Yess is born," said the Kareenian. "She will die. She is dying now, began dying when the Sleep ended. She is being kept alive by our combined energies and by the unconscious will of the infant within her. Let us hurry. Soon the wakers will be coming from their vaults, not knowing if this time Yess or Algul won, not knowing if they must rejoice or weep. We must not leave them long in doubt, but must get to the Temple. There we will enter the holy chamber of the Great Mother, will lie in mystical love and procreation with Her, in that act that cannot be described but can only be experienced. The swollen body of this creation of your hate and your love will deliver the baby and will die. And then we must wash and wrap the baby and have him ready to show the adoring people."

He squeezed Carmody's hand affectionately, then tightened his grip as the pangs struck again. But Carmody did not feel the bone-squeezing strength because he was fighting his own pain, hot and hard in his own belly, rising and falling in waves, the terrible hurt and awful ecstasy of giving birth to divinity.

That pain was also the light and fire of himself still exploding and dissolving into a million pieces. But now there was no panic, only a joy he had never known in accepting this light and fire and in the sureness that he would at the end of this destruction be whole, be one as few men are.

Through this pain, this joy, this sureness was a lacing of determination that he would pay for what he had done. Not pay in the sense that he would forever be plunged into self-punishment, into gloom and remorse and self-hate. No, that was a sickness, that was not the healthy way to pay. He must make up for what he had been and had done. Now he believed that this universe, though it still ran like a hard cold machine and presented no really sweet-smiling face to mankind, this world could be changed.

What means he would employ and just what sort of goal he would choose, he did not know just now. That would come later. At this moment, he was too busy carrying out the final act of the drama of the Sleep and the Awakening.

Suddenly he saw the faces of two men he had never expected to see any more. Ralloux and Skelder. The same, yet transfigured. Gone was the agony on Ralloux's face, replaced by

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serenity. Gone was the harshness and rigidity on Skelder's face, replaced by the softness of a smile.

"So you two came through all right," Carmody said throatily.

Wonderingly, he noted that one was still clad in his monk's robes but that the other had cast them off and was dressed in native clothes. He would have liked to find out just why this man accepted and the other rejected, but he was sure that both had their good and sufficient reasons, otherwise they would not have survived. The same look was on both their faces, and at the moment it did not matter which path either had chosen for his future.

"So you both came through," Carmody murmured, still scarcely able to believe it.

"Yes," replied one of them, which one Carmody couldn't determine, so dreamlike did everything seem, except for the reality of the waves of pain within his bowels. "Yes, we both came through the fire. But we were almost destroyed. On Dante's Joy, you know, you get what you really want."

Coming Next Month

There'll be two feature novelets in our next issue (on the stands in late May): one science fiction, an exciting new variant on the theme of the interstellar generations-ship, Chad Oliver's *The Wind Blows Free;* and one fantasy, of a magnificently American kind that I haven't seen the likes of since the death of Stephen Vincent Benét, Mary-Carter Roberts' *When Jack Smith Fought Old Satan.* Then there'll be a story by C. M. Kornbluth which is as wholeheartedly zany as its title: *MS. Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie,* plus more shorts by such regular favorites as Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson and John Novotny and a very special F&SF find: the first science fiction by that startling young man who convinced America that intellectuals can possess charm, Charles Van Doren.

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To try to straighten you out on Van Dorens: Mark, who now makes his first appearance in a fantasy magazine, is the brother of the late historian Carl, the brother-in-law of book review editor Irita, and the father of quiz show champion (as of this writing) Charles. Van Dorens have a way of being pre-eminent in their chosen fields; and Mark Van Doren's fields are poetry (for which he has received the Pulitzer Prize) and fiction. In addition to his mainstream fiction, he is a noted writer of crime stories (see the 1952 and 1956 volumes of QUEEN'S AWARDS *for splendid specimens) and an equally distinguished creator of fantasy. This last fact is too little known among enthusiasts; and F&SF proposes to remedy this state of affairs with a series of Van Doren's poetic and delightful imaginings, of which the first is this brief tale of a cobbler whose concern was as much with souls as with soles.*

The Little Place

by MARK VAN DOREN

OLD HENRY TOILED DOWN EDEN STREET, counting the blocks till he should be out of the business section and headed south toward home. He did this every evening on the way from work. But tonight, just as the lights were coming on, he lost his count. Something was different. He said to himself, halfway between Polk and Van Meter streets: "I don't remember any shoe shop here. Right on the sidewalk, too."

For so it seemed to him as he veered over to investigate. He didn't understand how he could be looking down Eden Street and yet into a shop. And in fact he wasn't; for in another minute he stood in front of a tall mirror, staring at himself, and heard a man's voice saying pleasantly: "The shoe shop is behind you."

He turned, and saw what so far he had seen but in reflection. It was surely the smallest shoe shop in the world—set back and in at a curious angle from the street, and occupying no more than a niche in the

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wall of store fronts he had been passing. There were no machines in it, and no rows of repaired shoes waiting to be called for. There was nothing but a narrow cobbler's bench, with six or seven leather soles piled neatly on it beside the customary tray of nails and an assortment of knives, needles, and hammers. There were two lasts, of course, the big one and the little one. And behind the bench, in the poor light of an oil lamp, there sat a young man, smiling.

"Come in," he said. "There is room for one more—just one. I saw you up the street, and hoped—"

"In the mirror you saw me." Old Henry shifted on his tired feet, wondering why he wasted time this way.

"How else? I see everybody. But not everybody sees me. Most of them see only themselves—as you did finally, but then you had to."

"Yes, but before that I saw you—this place—not me."

"The glass could have turned a trifle."

Old Henry looked around him. "Been here long? I go by every evening. I never—"

"No, I'm new. The reason I hoped you would come in was that—forgive me—you look tired."

"Always I am tired."

"I believe you."

"I am old."

"I believe you. And yet a fresh pair of soles might make you forget it. I hoped—"

Old Henry looked away. "Nothing is the matter with my shoes. My feet, either, except that they are old. A trick, was it, to get business? Mind you, I am not a wealthy man."

"Then there will be no business. Now that you are here, though, I could look your shoes over—mend a stitch here, put in a nail there—for nothing. If you will take them off—"

"I think I better not."

"Here is a stool. Sit down. Do take them off."

Old Henry sat watching the hands of the cobbler as they went nimbly over the shoes they had helped to remove.

"You are right," mused the young man. "These are in fair condition. And yet—here, for instance, I could make them perfect." He pointed to cracks along the edges of the soles; and before any protest was possible, pried them still wider with a short, thick-bladed knife.

"Now!" said Old Henry. "What have you done?"

"Wait till you see what I *will* do," said the cobbler, humming to himself as he reached for the rest of his tools. Old Henry overheard this much:

"Weary come, Weary go.
I am old and I am slow,
But I shall not be tired again,
Though I walk in cold and rain.
I am old, and do but creep,
Yet all my bones have gone to sleep.
How sweet a thing it is to know:
Weary come, Weary go."

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The cobbler, before he drew tight the last stitch in either sole, slipped between the layers of leather a thin piece of paper, making sure that it went in right side up. The right side was the printed side, for the old man saw lines of words—not very long, but very black.

"What did you put in?" he asked.

"What you just heard," said the cobbler. "Now—with my compliments—goodnight."

Before Old Henry could say thank you he was on the street again, picking his way carefully toward the next intersection.

It was true. He wasn't tired—just yet. But that was because he had taken a little rest. Another block, or two or three, or nine or ten and it would be the same as always. Pain everywhere; his joints hot; his heart heavy.

*

The cobbler saw three ragged boys running down Eden Street, dodging in and out among the adult pedestrians like so many hounds on a scent. They did this every evening, and as invariably was the case, the smallest of them trailed behind the other two. He was not only the smallest, he was lame; or if not lame exactly, he was handicapped in running by a weakness that showed as well in his pointed face and his abnormally large eyes. But it didn't occur to him that the others ought to let him overtake them. They never looked around.

Then here he was, his eyes larger still as he stared about the shop into which he had been whirled.

"Your name?" The cobbler asked it quietly.

"Tonio."

"A good name. But your shoes—they are not good. You cannot run."

"It isn't my shoes." He looked down. "I don't—I can't—"

"Let me see them, Tonio. Take them off."

The boy leaned and listened as the cobbler, turning the shoes over and over in his hands, sang softly to himself:

"The best is the worst,
The last is the first.
Tonio, Tonio, where will you fly?

Only so far
As the other ones are—
Not to be better, not to go by.

Oh, but you could,
And come to the wood;
A river; a mountain; the sea; the sky.

Only so fast;
Then each will be last.
Once I am with them, oh, I can die."

"Die?" said the boy. "What are you putting in my soles? Why did you open them that way?"

"So many questions!" The cobbler laughed. "Goodby, Tonio. Hurry along now and catch up with those two. What are their names?"

But Tonio was gone.

*

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A man with a dark hat stood in his place. He scowled at the cobbler, demanding to know where he was and why the mirror had misled him.

"Sit down there"—pointing to the stool—"and take them off. Your shoes."

The fellow took them off.

"One step,
And then stand still:
An ugly monument of will—
Yet not the power—
To move and kill.

One lifted foot
And then no more:
A stiffened statue, set before
This turning glass,
This fading store."

Why did they sit there, doing what he said? Even this murderer, whom the words angered so much that he stood up suddenly and raised both arms as if to strike the singer down. But all that happened was that he found the shoes in his hands and felt himself rotating toward the sidewalk whence he had come.

He took one step, and then could not take another.

*

Hour after hour he stood, unable to stir, until a sharp-eyed man who had been watching him from across Eden Street came over and said: "What's up? You never gave us *this* headache before—stopping traffic."

Though it was midnight, a circle of the curious had formed. It included an old man and his staring daughter. It included three small boys, one of whose faces shone with so rapt a pleasure that it was strange the sharp-eyed man missed it as he glanced about him.

"Well," he turned back and said, "if you won't talk here, I know where you will. There is plenty we want to hear. Where you been hiding, Smithie? Come along. Lieutenant's orders—bring you in."

Still the man did not move. But with great difficulty, as if his throat were sore, he whispered: "In there—that shoe place—*he* did this to me."

"What shoe place?"

The eyes of the curious followed quickly.

"Behind the mirror—a *little* place—in *there*."

"What mirror? Where?"

There was none. The shop was gone.

"Are you a policeman?" Old Henry stepped forward, his daughter holding tightly to his arm. "That is—no complaint, understand you—but I had *my* shoes fixed in there—tonight—and look! I walked all the way back—it was a pleasure—made her come too—to tell him—well—"

"Well, what?"

The only answer was a serene, uncomprehending smile as the woman pulled her father out of reach and went back with him down Eden Street.

"Like me," said Tonio. "I saw him too. I was in there—just for a little while, then I caught up with *them*."

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But the other boys, no lovers of the police, were not to be seen now. Tonio heard their running feet halfway to the next corner and flew suddenly after them.

Some runner, thought the sharp-eyed man. His feet don't touch the ground, they really don't.

But what was going on here?

"Anybody else know anything?" The sarcasm got what he wanted, silence.

"Break it up, then. Keep moving—all of you."

They melted away, and he was alone with the dark hat again.

"I'll take *you* in if I have to carry you. Do I have to?"

Ten minutes later, with help from the station house, he did.

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With his accustomed dry realism, Mr. Edmondson shows that few events necessarily work out as is expected in fiction—certainly not the triumphant colonization of Mars, nor the well-publicized heroism of an interplanetary

Rescue

by G. C. EDMONDSON

JASON DID NOT PANIC. LIKE ANY miner, he considered the explosion a normal hazard of the trade. Most of the colony was underground at the time. Those on the surface pitched in to dig out the rest. When time dragged beyond known limits of air supplies there was no point in further digging. Corpses don't care whether they're buried in one part of Mars or another. But Jason did.

He was one of those tall, craggy men who even in youth have an imperishable quality. Unlike most of the miners who were lured by high hopes of adventure, he came only for the money. With enough of it he could continue the solitary aimless course which life had led him since an overloaded school bus's inability to float had liberated Jason from his eldest-son's promise to a worn, dying widow. Even before that he'd never been much of a talker. The other miners liked him but they didn't quite understand the taciturn crawler driver.

For the company it was the final straw. The first Martian expedition had gotten a bigger welcome home than Columbus did. Few people read through the reams of romantic slush to know it had been a bust. Mars wasn't worth exploring. The second expedition blasted off on the momentum of a wave of popular sentiment, adroitly whipped up by a news syndicate manager. What did he care if another megabuck of the taxpayer's money went down the drain, or rather, up in smoke? It wasn't costing him anything and it did sell papers.

The second expedition found one radioactive deposit of doubtful value. A Wall Street wonder boy organized a shaky company and that was how the mine came to be. For five years it had continued a precarious existence, metallic fuels production barely paying the truly

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colossal cost of equipment supply.

Surface air was deficient in oxygen and too thin to make compression practicable. Had it not been for huge gas pockets which a lesser gravity had formed with a prodigality unknown on Earth, the mine would have been bankrupt long ago.

Albert Jason was subconsciously aware of all these facts but he hadn't been thinking of them at the moment of the explosion. He had been dragging a string of cars through "A" tunnel on the western side of the mountain. The seasonal rush at opposition had left a small mountain of supplies on the field. The last ship of the season was still unloading and Jason was in a hurry to get things underground before a sandstorm complicated the job.

When the first shock wave spattered a mitrailleusade of gravel over his pressurized tractor cab he slipped his breathing mask on automatically. The second, third and fourth shock waves passed through tunnel "A" in a succession of rapid flutters but Jason didn't feel them. When he came to he had a splitting headache and the tractor was still running, its treads biting vainly at the dusty air of the tunnel.

He dazedly shut off the drive and sat on the cab ceiling. The dust made visibility poor as he listened in the sudden silence of the stopped motor for falling rock. There was a grinding crunch as a piece the size of a small house hit the tractor a glancing blow and rolled away with the sedate motion peculiar to Martian gravity. He waited a few minutes but nothing else happened. The cabin was still pressurized. He radared a random pattern and discovered that he was blocked in both directions. No telling what a movement would do to the precarious balance in the tunnel. He decided to wait.

There was apparatus in the mine to analyze geological strains. He had supplies of food, water, and air on the battered cars. They'd have him out in less than a week. Meanwhile, the batteries would operate more efficiently in an upright position. After a look at the inverted bed and galley Jason decided he would too. Legs extended from the tractor and it righted like an agile scarab. He listened anxiously for falling rock but nothing happened.

Six men stood at the mouth of tunnel "B". One was the pilot of the last rocket. "Not exactly a triumphal return," he said glumly.

"Five out of fifty," one of the miners replied. "You won't find me sentimental about leaving. What'd the microwave have to say?"

"The company's tossing in the sponge. We'll be paid off. Their families will collect for the full term of their contracts." He gestured at the blocked tunnel.

"Better get a move on," the pilot said. "We're eight days past opposition already."

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A miner pulled the crystals and power pack from the microwave transmitter. "Only things light enough to be worth the freight back home," he explained. They packed small bags of personal belongings and climbed into a tractor for the trip around the mountain to tunnel "A" where the ship was waiting. Nobody looked back.

Blastoff dropped another slow-motion shower of rubble on Jason's tractor but he was asleep and didn't hear it. The air got a little ripe as he slept and his fogginess made him slipshod about adjusting it. It was nearly a week before he realized what was happening and took a benzedrine pill. When the air was working properly he sat down and took stock of the situation.

He wasn't sure of the time. That was one of the minor inconveniences of life on Mars. He had revamped his own calendar watch, putting in a slightly longer hairspring and running the slow adjustment to the peg. Still, it didn't work very well. Radar and seismograph recordings showed no signs of activity. He waited another day then, with a cautious eye on the overhead, he began digging.

Digging out wasn't as easy as it looked. First, he had to pass the string of eighteen cars over, under, or around the tractor before he could get at the face of the blockage. It took a day to dig a chamber large enough to do this. He wished he'd had the luck to be caught in a digger. The supply tractor had digging tools on its face as did all Martian vehicles but they were not designed for heavy digging, only to dig out after sandstorms.

The total length of tunnel "A" was one thousand meters. He had been about two-thirds of the way in when the explosion occurred. Radar and seismograph had no way of telling how far the tunnel was blocked. At worst he'd have to dig through six hundred meters of rubble. He started digging, hoping the tractor would outlast the blockage.

Two days and a hundred meters farther he broke into a free section. The tractor raced ahead at its ten kilometer top speed until he was within a hundred meters of the entrance. There the tunnel was blocked again. He weighed the air capacity of the tractor cab against the remaining distance and went back for the abandoned train. It was another day before he had his supply train with him again. Thus prepared, he started digging. In thirty minutes he saw a faint gegenschein of daylight ahead.

The trip around to the bubble at the entrance of tunnel "B" took another half hour. He noted the absence of ships at the field but that was natural. The season had been ending when he was trapped. The first jolt came when he opened the Bubbletown airlock and found nobody home. For an instant Jason stood riveted, remembering the time he'd led brothers and sister from the

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ceremony whose barbarism was heightened by his knowledge that the casket's sleazy lining ended just beyond view. He remembered the wide-eyed way the kids had looked from empty kitchen to him and back to empty rocking chair.

Jason decided everybody had been in the mine. Must have happened just after the supply ship blasted off or the crew would have made some attempt at rescue. Or would they? With opposition season ending he wondered. Anyhow Jason was stuck for an Earth year, more or less, until next opposition. He went back to the bubble and began storing supplies. One year's supplies for fifty men. Or fifty years for one man.

The first month he was busy. Winter was due in this hemisphere and winter on Mars entailed much more preparation than it had in Wisconsin. Jason thought fleetingly of the lonely farm on Earth but he was too busy for morbid nostalgia.

In time everything was put away. He checked the dome for leaks and patched a couple of doubtful spots where sandstorms had eroded the plastic. The wear was slight. Aside from meteors—only slightly more probable here than on Earth—he was safe.

During the long Martian winter he began checking other less urgent things. Up to now he had avoided the other men's quarters from some sense of impropriety. Now he began to get their effects in order for the day when the ship came. Forty-five cubicles were as their occupants had left them to spend twelve hours in the mine. The other five weren't. Hurried departure was evident in the things that were missing.

With a prickliness about the neck and shoulders he entertained a new idea. When he saw the missing crystals and power pack in the uninspected microwave transmitter his suspicions were verified. He rummaged through the library for spools on electronics.

In time he repaired the transmitter, clumsily replacing the crystals with more primitive stabilizing devices. Power was available from the large pack which maintained the bubble but when he tried it something was lacking. After a week of transmitting and receiving no reply he gave up. He had better luck with the P.A. system. No parts had been pirated from it. He spent several months working out small improvements on a stereophonic sound system. His thirtieth birthday passed unnoticed as he listened to a tape of Berlioz while puttering around with the hydroponic tanks, trying to improve the lettuce.

At times he wished for a dog or a cat but in the end decided it was better this way. There was no worry about what would happen to a pet when something happened to Jason.

Days passed swiftly. His calendar watch gave up the ghost and he was too busy to fix it. The roses weren't doing well in the Martian soil he

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had brought from outside the bubble. By the time they were transplanted to where they'd catch the anemic morning sunlight he'd lost track of time and there wasn't much point in fixing the watch. Besides, there was the model railroad he wanted to set up in the area where living quarters used to be.

The hydroponic tanks had yielded a small harvest of wheat and rye and he was busy firing brick. Jason hoped to duplicate the loaves he had eaten on Earth as a boy. First he had to make a mill and an oven. He noticed in an offhand way that his hairline was receding and the curly golden mat on his chest was showing tinges of gray.

On Earth economics boomed and busted. Wars grew hot, cold and lukewarm. News went through its hot seasons, its silly seasons and its doldrums. It was during the latter that the manager of a news syndicate, the same one who used to tub-thump about Martian exploitation, called in his star reporter.

"Rawson, how'd you like to take a trip?" he asked.

"Expense account?"

The chief nodded. "It's been nearly seven years since Mars was abandoned. How'd you like to do something on the ghost town?"

"But chief," the reporter protested, "you know how much it costs to land on Mars."

"Who said anything about landing? You'll take a moonshot and another ship from there. Orbit once or twice around Mars, shoot a few hundred feet of film over Bubbletown, and you're back in six months. It won't cost half as much for the trip from Luna to Mars as it does from here to Luna."

The ship orbited thirty miles above Jason's head as he was firing brick. The reporter was using a telephoto lens and didn't see Jason. If Jason had thought of looking up he wouldn't have been able to see the ship.

Clay had been something of a problem to Jason. He hadn't been sure of how well the Martian clays would fire until he remembered the vitrified rubble tossed up whenever a ship took off in the old days. He pondered about fueling the oven too. Experiments proved that some of the Martian bushes would burn well and didn't leave an offensive taste in the bread, but Jason didn't have the air to spare for burning them. In the end he reluctantly fired his oven electrically. The bubble's solar batteries furnished plenty of power.

About the time he was removing his first batch of bread from the oven a man on Earth was reading a letter which had run the gauntlet through progressively more critical readers and eventually landed in the sanctum sanctorum, a basket on his desk.

Dear Sir:

I read your series of articles on Bubbletown with great interest

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since my husband was one of the survivors. When I called his attention to the article he took one look at the pictures and said, "Hogwash! That's not Bubbletown!"

I don't intend to tell you how to run your business but do you think it sporting to deliberately perpetrate a hoax on the reading public?

Sincerely,
Anna K. Wilson

"Get Rawson in here!" the man roared. Across the room a picture fell from the wall.

"Yes, sir," a secretary replied through the squawk box.

"What is it, chief?" the reporter asked a few minutes later. The chief passed the letter to him wordlessly.

Rawson read the letter and handed it back. "Some crank," he said. "Why the excitement?"

"You mean you can stand there with a straight face and tell me you didn't spend six months getting drunk in some dive on the moon and faking a bunch of pictures?"

Rawson stared in astonishment. "I can produce dozens of witnesses to prove these prints are genuine," he said quietly.

The chief glared at him suspiciously. "Then how do you account for this?" he waved the letter.

"I don't know unless—"

They looked at each other in shocked silence.

"My God!" the chief breathed. "It'll make the biggest story since Robinson Crusoe."

Rawson compared the pictures he had taken with earlier shots hastily summoned from the morgue. "Whoever he is, he's sure fixed the place up. Look at that brickwork. Looks like a garden over there."

"Well, he's had plenty of time."

Four of the five Bubbletown survivors were still alive. With Rawson's help they reconstructed the day of the explosion. Eventually somebody remembered what Albert Jason had been doing that morning, and other details fell rapidly into place.

The news syndicate played the story for all it was worth and a rescue expedition was organized. Opposition season was due in another month. When it came a ship was ready.

When the ship sat down at the entrance to tunnel "A" on the opposite side of the mountain from Bubbletown, Jason was asleep. Rocket noise carried less than a half kilometer in the thin Martian air, and seismic shock was absorbed in the stack of mattresses which comprised Jason's bed. His first warning was a whoosh of lowering air pressure as a crowd of excited rescuers came boiling through the airlock.

So many people made him nervous after years of uninterrupted calm. He wished irritably that they wouldn't all talk at once.

"Say something for the people on Earth." Someone thrust a micro-

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phone in his face. Jason eyed it with distaste.

"I can't think of anything to say," he said finally. His voice sounded strange in his ears. He had gotten out of the habit of talking and singing to himself. It used to make him feel lonely.

They scattered about the dome, admiring his model railway and trampling his roses. Someone emerged from the hydroponic section with a fistful of half-grown rye. "What's this weed?" he shouted at Jason.

Someone photographed the oven from various angles and smeared lampblack over the gleaming brass door handle when a reflection threatened to fog one of his pictures. A man thrust a bottle at Jason and laughed uproariously when he choked and sputtered at the unaccustomed taste of whisky.

Several of the more boisterous finally went back to the ship to sleep. Jason said he'd used all the bedding and mattresses up in various projects. The others straggled out one by one. The pilot stayed longest.

"What's it really like on Earth?" Jason asked. They sat in overstuffed chairs of Jason's manufacture, drinking his home-brewed ale and munching on his rye bread with mustard and Swiss cheese.

The pilot thought a moment. "You didn't leave a wife or anything like that, did you?" he asked.

Jason shook his head. "Parents dead too," he added.

"Well," the pilot said, "I'm stationed on Luna. Don't get down to Earth very often. Two days in that gravity and my feet are killing me." He hesitated, trying to envision the changes wrought in the last seven years. "There's a new president. Automobiles are a little faster. Juvenile delinquency's a little higher. Population too. I guess that's about it," he concluded.

Jason sat sipping his ale. He finished it and reached into the humidor. They lit cigars and smoked in companionable silence.

"They'll never let you, you know," the pilot said after a while.

Jason looked up quickly.

The pilot gazed at the glowing tip of his cigar. "If I stayed they'd stay too. I'll have to take them back. It wouldn't work for two anyway," he said regretfully. "We'd be at each other's throats in six months."

"Yes, I suppose so," Jason said.

"They'll take you home, make no mistake. You'll go quietly or you'll go in a strait jacket. Well, guess I'd better be getting back to the ship. Nice to have met you." He held out his hand.

Jason shook it and saw him to the airlock. He went back to the fireplace where electric elements simulated glowing coals amid his handmade bricks. When the cigar was finished he went around the bubble, gathering things he might need. He put them into the tractor and drove it through the airlock. He sealed the airlock carefully and drove into

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the entrance of tunnel "B." There he planted a small explosive charge and detonator. He drove in another hundred meters and sent a radar beam into the detonator.

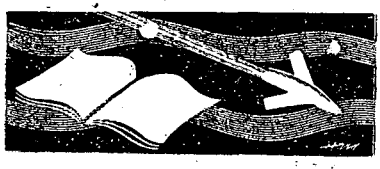
Seismic shock traveled through the hard Martian soil and up the landing stilts into the ship. The others went on sleeping. The pilot released a tremendous sigh but it was a long time before he slept.

Three days later they left. The rubble in the entrance of tunnel "B" made it only too evident what had happened. The pilot stood briefly before the tunnel with his hat in his hand, then turned and followed the others.

Jason waited until he felt the seismic wave of the ship's blastoff. It took him a full day to dig out. The airlock of Bubbletown gaped open. Jason drove the tractor in and gazed sickly at his roses. With luck he might bring some of them out of the frost blight. He closed the airlock and began building pressure from the reserve tanks. In the hydroponic section the lettuce was totally ruined. It would be months before he would have a new crop from seed. The wheat and rye were drooping.

They had rifled his symphonic collection for souvenirs. The Berlioz tapes were nearly all gone. Drifting sand had gritted its way through the airlock into his curtains. The hand-embroidered spread on his bed was gone.

The dirty bastards, he mumbled. Then he remembered there was no one to hear him.



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The list of science-fantasy writers in Playboy *sounds astonishingly much like a list of regular F&SF contributors: Beaumont, Bloch, Bradbury, Clarke, Matheson, Reynolds, Sheckley . . . (though it does seem a shame that* Playboy, *of all magazines, has so far overlooked F&SF's unique stable of fetching female fictioneers). In this* Playboy *story, Mr. Sheckley is concerned with the possible nature of love in the future—and hints at conclusions that may nag disturbingly at lovers in the present.*

Love, Incorporated

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

ALFRED SIMON WAS BORN ON KAZanga IV, a small agricultural planet near Arcturus, and there he drove a combine through the wheat fields, and in the long, hushed evenings listened to the recorded love songs of Earth.

Life was pleasant enough on Kazanga, and the girls were buxom, jolly, frank and acquiescent, good companions for a hike through the hills or a swim in the brook, staunch mates for life. But romantic—never! There was good fun to be had on Kazanga, in a cheerful open manner. But there was no more than fun.

Simon felt that something was missing in this bland existence. One day, he discovered what it was.

A vendor came to Kazanga in a battered spaceship loaded with books. He was gaunt, white-haired, and a little mad. A celebration was held for him, for novelty was appreciated on the outer worlds.

The vendor told them all the latest gossip; of the price war between Detroit II and III, and how fishing fared on Alana, and what the president's wife on Moracia wore, and how oddly the men of Doran V talked. And at last someone said, "Tell us of Earth."

"Ah!" said the vendor, raising his eyebrows. "You want to hear of the mother planet? Well, friends, there's no place like old Earth, no place at all. On Earth, friends, everything is possible, and nothing is denied."

"Nothing?" Simon asked.

"They've got a law against de-

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nial," the vendor explained, grinning. "No one has ever been known to break it. Earth is *different*, friends. You folks specialize in farming? Well, Earth specializes in impracticalities such as madness, beauty, war, intoxication, purity, horror, and the like, and people come from light-years away to sample these wares."

"And love?" a woman asked.

"Why girl," the vendor said gently, "Earth is the only place in the galaxy that still has love! Detroit II and III tried it and found it too expensive, you know, and Alana decided it was unsettling, and there was no time to import it on Moracia or Doran V. But as I said, Earth specializes in the impractical, and makes it pay."

"Pay?" a bulky farmer asked.

"Of course! Earth is old, her minerals are gone and her fields are barren. Her colonies are independent now, and filled with sober folk such as yourselves, who want value for their goods. So what else can old Earth deal in, except the non-essentials that make life worth living?"

"Were you in love on Earth?" Simon asked.

"That I was," the vendor answered, with a certain grimness. "I was in love, and now I travel. Friends, these books . . ."

For an exorbitant price, Simon bought an ancient poetry book, and reading, dreamed of passion beneath the lunatic moon, of dawn glimmering whitely upon lovers' parched lips, of locked bodies on a dark sea-beach, desperate with love and deafened by the booming surf.

And only on Earth was this possible! For, as the vendor told, Earth's scattered children were too hard at work wresting a living from alien soil. The wheat and corn grew on Kazanga, and the factories increased on Detroit II and III. The fisheries of Alana were the talk of the Southern star belt, and there were dangerous beasts on Moracia, and a whole wilderness to be won on Doran V. And this was well, and exactly as it should be.

But the new worlds were austere, carefully planned, sterile in their perfections. Something had been lost in the dead reaches of space, and only Earth knew love.

Therefore, Simon worked and saved and dreamed. And in his twenty-ninth year he sold his farm, packed all his clean shirts into a serviceable handbag, put on his best suit and a pair of stout walking shoes, and boarded the Kazanga-Metropole Flyer.

At last he came to Earth, where dreams *must* come true, for there is a law against their failure.

He passed quickly through Customs at Spaceport New York, and was shuttled underground to Times Square. There he emerged blinking into daylight, tightly clutching his handbag, for he had been warned about pickpockets, cutpurses, and other denizens of the city.

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Breathless with wonder, he looked around.

The first thing that struck him was the endless array of theaters, with attractions in two dimensions, three or four, depending upon your preference. And what attractions!

To the right of him a beetling marquee proclaimed: LUST ON VENUS! A DOCUMENTARY ACCOUNT OF SEX PRACTICES AMONG THE INHABITANTS OF THE GREEN HELL! SHOCKING! REVEALING!

He wanted to go in. But across the street was a war film. The billboard shouted, THE SUN BUSTERS! DEDICATED TO THE DARE-DEVILS OF THE SPACE MARINES! And further down was a picture called TARZAN BATTLES THE SATURNIAN GHOULS!

Tarzan, he recalled from his reading, was an ancient ethnic hero of Earth.

It was all wonderful, but there was so much more! He saw little open shops where one could buy food of all worlds, and especially such native Terran dishes as pizza, hotdogs, spaghetti and knishes. And there were stores which sold surplus clothing from the Terran spacefleets, and other stores which sold nothing but beverages.

Simon didn't know what to do first. Then he heard a staccato burst of gunfire behind him, and whirled.

It was only a shooting gallery, a long, narrow, brightly painted place with a waist-high counter. The manager, a swarthy fat man with a mole on his chin sat on a high stool and smiled at Simon with crafty eyes.

"Try your luck?"

Simon walked over and saw that, instead of the usual targets, there were four scantily dressed women at the end of the gallery, seated upon bullet-scored chairs. They had tiny bull's-eyes painted on their foreheads and above each breast.

"But do you fire real bullets?" Simon asked.

"Of course!" the manager said. "There's a law against false advertising on Earth. Real bullets and real gals! Step up and knock one off!"

One of the women called out, "Come on, sport! Bet you miss me!"

Another screamed, "He couldn't hit the broad side of a spaceship!"

"Sure he can!" another shouted. "Come on, sport!"

Simon rubbed his forehead and tried not to act surprised. After all, this was Earth, where anything was allowed as long as it was commercially feasible.

He asked, "Are there galleries where you shoot men, too?"

"Of course," the manager said. "But you ain't no pervert, are you?"

"Certainly not!"

"You an outworlder?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"The suit. Always tell by the suit." The fat man closed his eyes and chanted, "Step up, step up and kill a woman! Get rid of a load of repressions! Squeeze the trigger and feel the old anger ooze out of you! Better than a massage! Better than

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getting drunk! Step up, step up and kill a woman!"

Simon asked one of the girls, "Do you stay dead when they kill you?"

"Don't be stupid," the girl said.

"But the shock—"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I could do worse."

Simon was about to ask how she could do worse, when the manager leaned over the counter, speaking confidentially.

"Look, buddy. Look what I got here."

Simon glanced over the counter and saw a compact submachine gun.

"For a ridiculously low price," the manager said, "I'll let you use the tommy. You can spray the whole place, shoot down the fixtures, rip up the walls. This drives a .45 slug, buddy, and it kicks like a mule. You really know you're firing when you fire the tommy."

"I am not interested," Simon said sternly.

"I've got a grenade or two," the manager said. "Fragmentation, of course. You could really—"

"No!"

"For a price," the manager said, "you can shoot *me,* too, if that's how your tastes run, although I wouldn't have guessed it. What do you say?"

"No. Never! This is horrible!"

The manager looked at him blankly. "Not in the mood now? OK. I'm open twenty-four hours a day. See you later, sport."

"Never!" Simon said, walking away.

"Be expecting you, lover!" one of the women called after him.

Simon went to a refreshment stand and ordered a small glass of cola-cola. He found that his hands were shaking. With an effort he steadied them, and sipped his drink. He reminded himself that he must not judge Earth by his own standards. If people on Earth enjoyed killing people, and the victims didn't mind being killed, why should anyone object?

Or should they?

He was pondering this when a voice at his elbow said, "Hey, bub."

Simon turned and saw a wizened, furtive-faced little man in an oversize raincoat standing beside him.

"Out-of-towner?" the little man asked.

"I am," Simon said. "How did you know?"

"The shoes. I always look at the shoes. How do you like our little planet?"

"It's—confusing," Simon said carefully. "I mean I didn't expect—well—"

"Of course," the little man said. "You're an idealist. One look at your honest face tells me that, my friend. You've come to Earth for a definite purpose. Am I right?"

Simon nodded. The little man said, "I know your purpose, my friend. You're looking for a war that will make the world safe for something, and you've come to the right place. We have six major wars

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running at all times, and there's never any waiting for an important position in any of them."

"Sorry, but—"

"Right at this moment," the little man said impressively, "the downtrodden workers of Peru are engaged in a desperate struggle against a corrupt and decadent monarchy. One more man could swing the contest! *You*, my friend, could be that man! *You* could guarantee the socialist victory!"

Observing the expression on Simon's face, the little man said quickly, "But there's a lot to be said for an enlightened aristocracy. The wise old king of Peru (a philosopher-king in the deepest Platonic sense of the word) sorely needs your help. His tiny corps of scientists, humanitarians, Swiss guards, knights of the realm and royal peasants is sorely pressed by the foreign-inspired socialist conspiracy. A single man, now—"

"I'm not interested," Simon said.

"In China, the Anarchists—"

"No."

"Perhaps you'd prefer the Communists in Wales? Or the Capitalists in Japan? Or if your affinities lie with a splinter group such as Feminists, Prohibitionists, Free Silverists, or the like, we could probably arrange—"

"I don't want a war," Simon said.

"Who could blame you?" the little man said, nodding rapidly. "War is hell. In that case, you've come to Earth for love."

"How did you know?" Simon asked.

The little man smiled modestly. "Love and war," he said, "are Earth's two staple commodities. We've been turning them both out in bumper crops since the beginning of time."

"Is love very difficult to find?" Simon asked.

"Walk uptown two blocks," the little man said briskly. "Can't miss it. Tell 'em Joe sent you."

"But that's impossible! You can't just walk out and—"

"What do you know about love?" Joe asked.

"Nothing."

"Well, we're experts on it."

"I know what the books say," Simon said. "Passion beneath the lunátic moon—"

"Sure, and bodies on a dark seabeach desperate with love and deafened by the booming surf."

"You've read that book?"

"It's the standard advertising brochure. I must be going. Two blocks uptown. Can't miss it."

And with a pleasant nod, Joe moved into the crowd.

Simon finished his cola-cola and walked slowly up Broadway, his brow knotted in thought, but determined not to form any premature judgements.

When he reached 44th Street he saw a tremendous neon sign flashing brightly. It said, LOVE, INC.

Smaller neon letters read, *Open*

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24 Hours a Day! Seven days a week!

Beneath that it read, *Up One Flight.*

Simon frowned, for a terrible suspicion had just crossed his mind. Still, he climbed the stairs and entered a small, tastefully furnished reception room. From there he was sent down a long corridor to a numbered room.

Within the room was a handsome gray-haired man who rose from behind an impressive desk and shook his hand, saying, "Well! How are things on Kazanga?"

"How did you know I was from Kazanga?"

"That shirt. I always look at the shirt. I'm Mr. Tate, and I'm here to serve you to the best of my ability. You are—"

"Simon, Alfred Simon."

"Please be seated, Mr. Simon. Cigarette? Drink? You won't regret coming to us, sir. We're the oldest love-dispensing firm in the business, and much larger than our closest competitor, Passion Unlimited. Moreover, our fees are far more reasonable, and bring you an improved product. Might I ask how you heard of us? Did you see our full page ad in the *Times?* Or—"

"Joe sent me," Simon said.

"Ah, he's an active one," Mr. Tate said, shaking his head playfully. "Well sir, there's no reason to delay. You've come a long way for love, and love you shall have." He reached for a button on his desk, but Simon stopped him.

Simon said, "I don't want to be rude or anything, but . . ."

"Yes?" Mr. Tate said, with an encouraging smile.

"I don't understand this," Simon blurted out, flushing deeply, beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. "I think I'm in the wrong place. I didn't come all the way to Earth just for . . . I mean, you can't really sell *love,* can you? Not *love!* I mean, then it isn't really *love,* is it?"

"But of course!" Mr. Tate said, half rising from his chair in astonishment. "That's the whole point! Anyone can buy sex. Good lord, it's the cheapest thing in the universe, next to human life. But *love* is rare, *love* is special, *love* is found only on Earth. Have you read our brochure?"

"Bodies on a dark sea-beach?" Simon asked.

"Yes, that one. I wrote it. Gives something of the feeling, doesn't it? You can't get that feeling from just *anyone,* Mr. Simon. You can get that feeling only from someone who loves you."

Simon said dubiously, "It's not genuine love though, is it?"

"Of course it is! If we were selling simulated love, we'd label it as such. The advertising laws on Earth are strict, I can assure you. Anything can be sold, but it must be labeled properly. That's ethics, Mr. Simon!"

Tate caught his breath, and continued in a calmer tone. "No, sir, make no mistake. Our product is

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not a substitute. It is the exact selfsame feeling that poets and writers have raved about for thousands of years. Through the wonders of modern science we can bring this feeling to you at your convenience, attractively packaged, completely disposable, and for a ridiculously low price."

Simon said, "I pictured something more—spontaneous."

"Spontaneity has its charm," Mr. Tate agreed. "Our research labs are working on it. Believe me, there's nothing science can't produce, as long as there's a market for it."

"I don't like any of this," Simon said, getting to his feet. "I think I'll just go see a movie."

"Wait!" Mr. Tate cried. "You think we're trying to put something over on you. You think we'll introduce you to a girl who will *act* as though she loved you, but who in reality will not. Is that it?"

"I guess so," Simon said.

"But it just isn't so! It would be too costly for one thing. For another, the wear and tear on the girl would be tremendous. And it would be psychologically unsound for her to attempt living a lie of such depth and scope."

"Then how do you do it?"

"By utilizing our understanding of science and the human mind."

To Simon, this sounded like double talk. He moved toward the door.

"Tell me something," Mr. Tate said. "You're a bright-looking young fellow. Don't you think you could tell real love from a counterfeit item?"

"Certainly."

"There's your safeguard! *You* must be satisfied, or don't pay us a cent."

"I'll think about it," Simon said.

"Why delay? Leading psychologists say that *real* love is a fortifier and a restorer of sanity, a balm for damaged egos, a restorer of hormone balance, and an improver of the complexion. The love we supply you has everything: deep and abiding affection, unrestrained passion, complete faithfulness, an almost mystic affection for your defects as well as your virtues, a pitiful desire to please, *and,* as a plus that only Love, Inc., can supply: that uncontrollable first spark, that blinding moment of love at first sight!"

Mr. Tate pressed a button. Simon frowned undecisively. The door opened, a girl stepped in, and Simon stopped thinking.

She was tall and slender, and her hair was brown with a sheen of red. Simon could have told you nothing about her face, except that it brought tears to his eyes. And if you asked him about her figure, he might have killed you.

"Miss Penny Bright," said Tate, "meet Mr. Alfred Simon."

The girl tried to speak but no words came, and Simon was equally dumb-struck. He looked at her and *knew.* Nothing else mattered. To the depths of his heart he knew

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that he was truly and completely loved.

They left at once, hand in hand, and were taken by jet to a small white cottage in a pine grove, overlooking the sea, and there they talked and laughed and loved, and later Simon saw his beloved wrapped in the sunset flame like a goddess of fire. And in blue twilight she looked at him with eyes enormous and dark, her known body mysterious again. The moon came up, bright and lunatic, changing flesh to shadow, and she wept and beat his chest with her small fists, and Simon wept too, although he did not know why. And at last dawn came, faint and disturbed, glimmering upon their parched lips and locked bodies, and nearby the booming surf deafened, inflamed, and maddened them.

At noon they were back in the offices of Love, Inc. Penny clutched his hand for a moment, then disappeared through an inner door.

"Was it real love?" Mr. Tate asked.

"Yes!"

"And was everything satisfactory?"

"Yes! It was love, it was the real thing! But why did she insist on returning?"

"Post-hypnotic command," Mr. Tate said.

"What?"

"What did you expect? Everyone wants love, but few wish to pay for it. I have your bill right here, sir."

Simon paid, fuming. "This wasn't necessary," he said. "Of course I would pay you for bringing us together. Where is she now? What have you done with her?"

"Please," Mr. Tate said soothingly. "Try to calm yourself."

"I don't want to be calm!" Simon shouted. "I want Penny!"

"That will be impossible," Mr. Tate said, with the barest hint of frost in his voice. "Kindly stop making a spectacle of yourself."

"Are you trying to get more money out of me?" Simon shrieked. "All right, I'll pay. How much do I have to pay to get her out of your clutches?" And Simon yanked out his wallet and slammed it on the desk.

Mr. Tate poked the wallet with a stiffened forefinger. "Put that back in your pocket," he said. "We are an old and respectable firm. If you raise your voice again, I shall be forced to have you ejected."

Simon calmed himself with an effort, put the wallet back in his pocket and sat down. He took a deep breath and said, very quietly, "I'm sorry."

"That's better," Mr. Tate said. "I will not be shouted at. However, if you are reasonable, I can be reasonable too. Now, what's the trouble?"

"The trouble?" Simon's voice started to lift. He controlled it and said, "She loves me."

"Of course."

"Then how can you separate us?"

"What has the one thing got to do

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with the other?" Mr. Tate asked. "Love is a delightful interlude, a relaxation, good for the intellect, for the ego, for the hormone balance, and for the skin tone. But one would hardly wish to *continue* loving, would one?"

"I would," Simon said. "This love was special, unique—"

"They all are," Mr. Tate said. "But as you know, they are all produced in the same way."

"What?"

"Surely you know something about the mechanics of love production?"

"No," Simon said. "I thought it was—natural."

Mr. Tate shook his head. "We gave up natural selection centuries ago, shortly after the Mechanical Revolution. It was too slow, and commercially unfeasable. Why bother with it, when we can produce any feeling at will by conditioning and proper stimulation of certain brain centers? The result? Penny, completely in love with you! Your own bias, which we calculated, in favor of her particular somatotype, made it complete. We always throw in the dark sea-beach, the lunatic moon, the pallid dawn—"

"Then she could have been made to love anyone," Simon said slowly.

"Could have been *brought* to love anyone," Mr. Tate corrected.

"Oh, lord, how did she get into this horrible work?" Simon asked.

"She came in and signed a contract in the usual way," Tate said. "It pays very well. And at the termination of the lease, we return her original personality—untouched! But why do you call the work horrible? There's nothing reprehensible about love."

"It wasn't love!" Simon cried.

"But it was! The genuine article! Unbiased scientific firms have made qualitative tests of it, in comparison with the natural thing. In every case, *our* love tested out to more depth, passion, fervor and scope."

Simon shut his eyes tightly, opened them and said, "Listen to me. I don't care about your scientific tests. I love her, she loves me, that's all that counts. Let me speak to her! I want to marry her!"

Mr. Tate wrinkled his nose in distaste. "Come, come, man! You wouldn't want to *marry* a girl like that! But if it's marriage you're after, we deal in that, too. I can arrange an idyllic and nearly spontaneous love-match for you with a guaranteed government-inspected virgin—"

"No! I love Penny! At least let me speak to her!"

"That will be quite impossible," Mr. Tate said.

"Why?"

Mr. Tate pushed a button on his desk. "Why do you think? We've wiped out the previous indoctrination. Penny is now in love with someone else."

And then Simon understood. He realized that even now Penny was looking at another man with that passion he had known, feeling for

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another man that complete and bottomless love that unbiased scientific firms had shown to be so much greater than the old-fashioned, commercially unfeasable natural selection, and that upon that same dark sea-beach mentioned in the advertising brochure—

He lunged for Tate's throat. Two attendants, who had entered the office a few moments earlier, caught him and led him to the door.

"Remember!" Tate cried. "This in no way invalidates your own experience."

Hellishly enough, Simon knew that what Tate had said was true.

And then he found himself on the street.

At first, all he desired was to escape from Earth, where the commercial impracticalities were more than a normal man could afford. He walked very quickly, and his Penny walked beside him, her face glorified with love for him, and him, and him, and you, and you.

And of course he came to the shooting gallery.

"Try your luck?" the manager asked.

"Set 'em up," said Alfred Simon.

★ ★ ★

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

AS FORECAST EARLY IN THE DAY BY this reviewer, the barrage of science fiction films—which threatened to wipe out the movie-going public en masse—has ceased. Salvo after salvo was launched upon us, from a seemingly inexhaustible arsenal; then, abruptly, this was reduced to a few inconsequential guerilla attacks; and now, happily, we have but an occasional sniper to contend with. It is a blessed relief. But we must not allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security! If I know the Enemy, and I think I do, they're merely resting, gathering their forces, preparing for a fresh assault upon our weakened fort. What form this offensive will take, I cannot say. It may consist of saturation bombing: they may actually *release* all the pictures that, according to some reviewers, are either in the works or in the can; or it may be a series of sneak raids, whereby we can never feel completely safe; or (and I wouldn't put it past the devils) they may even resort to trickery and subterfuge. That would be deadly. After all, however spunky we may be, it can't be denied that we are also tired —a ragged little army of movie fans, weary of these eternal skirmishes with Hollywood. It would be easy to fool us. In fact, the simplicity with which they could annihilate our band—leaving only the children and those who do not remember better days; leaving only the tasteless many who, although they prefer steak, are willing to gulp offal—this frightens me.

Think about it . . .

First they starve us. Then they dispatch a bedizened herald with greetings. We eye him warily, but his credentials seem in order. He bears a message from the Cinema Satraps. We listen, but it is almost too good for belief. The Enemy, still ensconced in their citadel, impregnable as ever, have, the herald ululates, decided to surrender! Unconditionally! From this day forth, no flyblown remakes of THEM; no Mad Professors; no Robot Monstrosities; no Atomic Werewolves; no Flying Saucers; no Creatures from lagoons, black or otherwise; from this day forth—only the best! Dramatic pictures, adult pictures, imaginative, *new* pictures!

"Oh, yeah?" some of our more cynical members snort. "How do we know you're not bluffing?"

The herald runs a hand nervously through his hennaed hair and smiles feebly. "My masters anticipated this

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sort of reaction," he mews. "And they have sent proof of their good intentions!" With which he scurries behind a jacaranda bush and pops back with a screen and projector. "Seat yourselves, gentlemen!"

We do, mainly because we are too feeble to stand, and in a moment we are viewing THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (Universal-International).

Afterward, amid the cheers and whistles, we shake hands with the herald, thump him amidships, and send him back to the citadel with our acceptance of the surrender, forgiveness for past sins, and our wishes for a new Golden Age.

See how easy it would be? Well, I say, look out, that's all. They're up to something, those guys. Dollars to doughnuts that, having inflated the fragile membranes of hope in our hearts, the blackguards will surround us with THE MONSTER FROM THE ALIMENTARY CANAL, ROCKET AROUND THE CLOCK, REVOLT OF THE BEAST-APES FROM PLUTO, ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET THE SKY MARSHAL OF THE UNIVERSE, or worse. And that will be the end of us. We'll shrug, throw down our weapons and vow never again to see a science fiction motion picture.

In other words, we'll lose.

It needn't happen, though, no matter what strategy they use. So long as there are a few of us willing to risk our eyesight, nerves and sanity in order to issue distress signals, the rest may, by avoiding the clinkeroos, fight on relentlessly. We're not many, but we're loud; and our cries must be heard else there is no justice. It won't result, I think, in complete victory, ever: one has only to glance at the automobiles we Americans drive or listen to the songs we make popular to realize this. But partial victory is better than none, and this should be our constant goal.

The herald's first offering in this time of uneasy peace is, of course, from the novel THE SHRINKING MAN (just reissued by Gold Medal) by one of science fiction's ablest and most successful practitioners, Richard Matheson. Even better, Matheson was permitted (doubtless through a slip-up) to write the script himself, almost exactly the way he wanted it to be. With such a foundation, it ought to be a good picture and, I'm happy to report, it is. Other worthies have been maltreated by Universal-International, but, perhaps in penitence, or for more devious reasons, they decided to do things right this time. (And in so doing, invite our increased rage over such slovenly productions as THE MOLE PEOPLE, etc.) No necessary expense was spared, no shortcuts taken, no—or, at any rate, few—concessions made to John Q. The direction by Jack Arnold is surprisingly good and frequently subtle, at times reminiscent of James Whale's work; it demonstrates that Arnold's talent, when he gets an opportunity to use it, is considerable. He *could* go far. Albert Zugsmith, the producer,

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brother of mystery novelist Leane Zugsmith, did an exemplary job all the way down the line, from his initial choice of property to his carrying through of the original ideals, and I, for one, wish him all measure of success. It goes without saying that the screenplay is excellent, generally lacking the rough spots that usually show on a novelist's maiden effort in the field. The dialogue is crisp and clean, whip-spare. The scenes build very nicely to the various climaxes, and at no time does the film begin to lag or go static. The fight with the spider is everything it should be, and will leave the kiddies and their parents gasping for breath. As for the special effects, they are, next to those in FORBIDDEN PLANET (which cost a great deal more money), the best I have seen in a long time. The giant chairs, for instance, don't look like giant chairs: they are so realistic that the hero is made to look small, which is the way it ought to be but seldom is in similar excursions.

In the central role of Scott Carey, Grant Williams, an Actor's Studio alumnus (along with Marlon Brando, John Cassavetes, the late James Dean, *et al.*), does a very good though somewhat imperfect job. His general grumpiness during the first section of the film (when he is supposed to be "normal") does not invite much sympathy for him when he becomes afflicted with Matheson's Disease. However, he is a welcome relief from the likes of John Agar and the numerous Tabs and Rocks with their omnipresent Smiles of Health. Randy Stuart does well as the wife, as does June Havoc's daughter, April Kent, as Clarice the midget. (Someday we may be fortunate enough to see June Havoc, April Kent, May Wynn, Fredric March and Jan August in a remake of SEPTEMBER SONG, but I doubt it.) Raymond Bailey, Paul Langton and William Schallert round out the fine cast.*

I trust the plot is familiar to most readers of F&SF: Scott Carey, receiving lethal doses of insecticide and atomic fall-out, in that order, begins, inexplicably, to shrink. He shrinks exactly one-seventh of an inch per day, and try as they may, the doctors cannot help him. His wife attempts to comfort him at first, but soon he is so small that he barely comes up to her knees and thereafter he begins to experience profound feelings of insignificance and the marriage, to put it mildly, suffers. Finally, what with well-meaning but idiotic efforts to succor the diminishing protagonist—once by presenting him with a carnival midget as a possible friend!—things get out of hand. Carey retreats to the cellar, overwhelmed with the ignominy of his situation, and that is where he meets his enemy, the spider, and *that* is where the real fun begins. He gets smaller

*Footnote for aelurophiles: The un-credited cat outshines most of these human beings. I hope he realizes the starring possibilities of THE DOOR INTO SUMMER.—A.B.

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while, to his eyes, the spider gets bigger, and there eventually ensues a battle of unrivaled savagery. Carey skewers the arachnid on the end of a pin, but his troubles are still not over, not by a long shot. For he continues to shrink, and shrink, and shrink, and . . . go see the picture and find out what happens. Maybe it follows the novel, maybe it doesn't. I'm not telling.

Though it isn't strictly science fiction and isn't strictly fantasy, either, AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS deserves a mention in this column. The Old Master, Jules Verne, is completely overpowered by the ubiquitous Mike Todd—it is, in fact, doubtful that he would recognize his own story—but the picture itself is such a pure delight that one would have to be very sour indeed to quibble. So long that the producers could have slipped in Eugene O'Neill's LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT as a subplot, AROUND THE WORLD positively scampers, at breakneck speed, never permitting ennui to set in—which is more than can be said for most of the other saga-size spectacles. As Phileas Fogg, David Niven is nothing short of perfect: his wry approach gives the whole thing a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek flavor. (James Mason provided a similar service, it will be remembered, in 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA.) The famed Mexican comedian, Cantinflas, emerges as a genius second only to Chaplin, and comes very close to stealing the show away from everyone. And I do mean everyone: most of the "names" in Hollywood are in the film, playing bit (or "cameo") parts. The screenplay is a model of construction, but whether the credit is to go to S. J. Perelman or to James Poe is a question not yet decided. Poe, who does not receive name credit, claims he did most of the work; Perelman is silent. The matter is in litigation. In any case, it's quite a package, and should not under any circumstances be missed.

Speaking of Jules Verne, JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH is still in the offing, and I have a hunch we'll see it before long. Aldous Huxley, of all people, was being considered for the scripting job, but Richard Matheson—who is currently engaged in finishing a pilot film for a projected Verne TV series—is also a strong contender.

Good news department: We will soon be presented with a television series based on the short stories of Ray Bradbury. Bradbury will script ten of the thirty selections.

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The Science Stage

by WILLIAM MORRISON

GOOD AS GOLD is a comedy which has very many hilarious moments and a few dull ones. In happier days for the theatre it would have had a long run on Broadway and amused a great many people, as it amused me and a considerable part of its first and second night audiences. But in this era of hit-or-flop, it appears to be not long for this street. It has several weak spots (as has every play that becomes a hit). And those individuals who have had their toes, or at least their feelings, stepped on have concentrated their attack on the weak spots, on occasion even hitting slightly below the belt.

Roddy McDowall, as Ben Franklin, boy botanist, arrives in Washington with his great invention: a simple method for converting gold into dirt. But the dirt he produces is not the ordinary stuff that turns a housewife's wash tattle-tale gray and enlivens a gossip columnist's news. This golden soil, as a Congressman calls it, can make vegetables grow at once to giant size. A few teaspoonfuls can feed a city, a cartload or so derived from one of the Fort Knox billions can end starvation in most of the world. Our naive Utopian (from a small town of that name) is well aware of the possibilities for good in his discovery, and completely unaware of the twisted little minds of the people he will have to deal with. But he learns and, to its amusement, so does the audience.

Being set in Washington, GOOD AS GOLD cannot help being a political play. At least if it could help it, it makes no attempt to do so. Our hero, as befits any man foolish enough to want to help humanity, spends a considerable part of his time in jail—Thomas Jefferson Jail, no less, named after the man whose name in American history stands for freedom. When out of jail he is to be found, too frequently for his own good, in a Congressman's office. The play, as you can see, has not only its farcical but its grim moments.

Now a political play runs special dangers. What struck Mr. Patrick and some of its viewers as a suitable subject for satire struck others as an object of reverence, and they regarded the goings on in GOOD AS GOLD as sheer blasphemy. If you consider Congress and the FBI synonymous with what is best in American life, you will sit stunned and outraged at the shenanigans on the Belasco stage.

You may even find unfunny the antics of Paul Ford as Congressman Fairweather, a dimwit wise in the clichés of politics, a crook with a heart of debased gold, a paste dia-

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mond in the rough. My own feeling is that Ford did a fine job. As Congressman Jason, Robert Emhardt is shrewder, but basically just as stupid, even more of a demagog, and thoroughly vicious. If you are a Congressman yourself the chances are that you will not like this play. Nor will it please you if you are an FBI man. The two representatives of that organization here pictured represent the triumph of scientific detection. They scrape the dirt from Ben Franklin's shoes, thus getting a clue to his native soil. They stick a cigarette in his mouth and pull it out again to obtain material for a saliva test, although he is quite willing to spit.

Even if you are not in Congress or the FBI, if you have a large bump of reverence, you will not find this funny. The actual weaknesses of the play, however, in contrast to those that may be read into it by the too reverent, appear to me to stem from the conflict between its sober theme and its cockeyed treatment. Ben Franklin is so serious in his mission of feeding the world that he makes you serious too. But to integrate the serious and the farcical in a single play is not easy. John Patrick tried hard but did not succeed completely. As the play is, the serious moments retard the pace and interrupt the comic mood.

Better direction might have glossed over this. It could not, however, have hidden the other weaknesses which result from this conflict: those of characterization. Roddy McDowall, on stage for most of the play, does a good job, but the character is not well enough drawn for him to do a great one. Loretta Leversee is attractive and appealing in a superficial role, and Juleen Compton has enough in three dimensions to make it clear why this is one science fiction play that need make no reference to four. Zero Mostel and Robert Emhardt are intermittently funny in roles that should have given them better material. Only Paul Ford has a role into which he can and does sink his teeth, and he is responsible for the most consistently amusing playing of the evening.

With all its weaknesses, GOOD AS GOLD remained to me an enjoyable play. I can only regret that there's small chance it will be running when you read this.

GOOD AS GOLD, *by John Patrick, based on the book by Alfred Toombs [Crowell, 1955]. Directed by Albert Marre; settings by Peter Larkin; presented by Cheryl Crawford and William Myers at the Belasco Theatre.*

There are fifteen characters and some double roles. The main characters are:

BENJAMIN	*Roddy McDowall*
DOC PENNY	*Zero Mostel*
BARBARA	*Loretta Leversee*
CONGRESSMAN FAIRWEATHER	*Paul Ford*
CONGRESSMAN JASON	*Robert Emhardt*
FREDRICA	*Juleen Compton*

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I was surprised, a year ago, to see Moonshine *published as "An* Atlantic *'First'"; Ruth M. Goldsmith's* first *first story,* Yankee Exodus, *had appeared in F&SF three years earlier (July, 1953; reprinted in the Bleiler-Dikty* BEST S. F. STORIES: 1954). *I was even more surprised when Winona McClintic, whose earliest fiction appeared in F&SF's first issue back in 1949, was named as author of the best "*Atlantic *'First'" of 1956 (and a wonderful story it is). Our sister publication,* Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, *has had at least one similar surprise, with Joseph Whitehill; and we've reached the conclusion that "An* Atlantic *'First'" means "a first sale to* Atlantic." *Queen and I are thinking of seeing if we can make it.*

But the question of who "discovered" Miss Goldsmith is less important than the fact that she tells a bright, amusing, thirstifying tale of interstellar exploration. (And I extend thanks to Mildred Clingerman for calling it to my attention.)

Moonshine

by RUTH M. GOLDSMITH

THE DAY OCIE POWELL'S STILL BLEW up it brought down two ducks headed back north and an Ix ship that had been gliding low. Only the ducks were lucky enough to drop out of sight for good and miss the rest of the confusion.

For a time Ocie and his partners, Lee Oliver and Ranse Hawkins, lay where they landed in a clump of palmettos. Under the circumstances it was pleasant to rest there, even necessary. They'd found the cooking-off hot and tiring and tedious and had offered these findings to each other as reasons for sampling the run—until they got against giving reasons. Then they'd just kept on sampling. When they opened their eyes now the twisted pine branches above revolved around them. When they closed their eyes they revolved around themselves.

But the Ixians, grassy-green, four-legged, and two-headed, climbed out of their ship and set out determined-

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ly to locate the disturbance that had brought them down.

The three men waited, patiently and peaceably, for the world to right itself, until the sound of tramping feet bothered them into raising their heads. The site had been chosen with an eye to the view. On a clear day and with normal vision they could see far across the level ground with its meager scattering of tall, straight-trunked pines—far enough in every direction to give them plenty of time to leave in case someone they didn't feel like welcoming was coming.

They saw the Ixians some distance away, spread out fanwise and moving toward them. The Florida sun sparkled sharply off the approaching figures, and the three looked around for their flat-topped cowboy hats, and pulled them low over their eyes.

"Looks like the sheriff's done bought hisself some uniforms," Ocie said.

"Man, they sure are *bright,*" Lee said. "They must've raised the fines to pay for that outfit."

"We'd better be getting out of here," Ocie said.

Spanish moss hung still on the branches, and mash dripped slowly down, as they studied the possibility. It meant getting up and going over to the truck, starting it up—which might be difficult because it was an aging and ailing machine—and then bouncing over the open ground until they came to the road. It was an energetic measure.

On the other hand, as Ranse Hawkins finally decided it, "We stay still, maybe they won't find us."

The feet tramped steadily nearer. Ocie found the funnel on the ground near him and, holding it to his eyes like a telescope, peeked out once through the palmetto fans and spotted the antennae on top of the green heads. "Walkie-talkie," he whispered disgustedly, shoving the funnel in his pocket. "That ain't hardly playing fair."

The antennae bent and pointed at where the men were hidden, and quivered at each other. The feet trudged a little more and stopped. The three could hear better than they could see and they knew that they'd been ringed in.

They got up sheepishly, hands in the air.

"Howdy, Sheriff," they said pleasantly, swaying slightly toward the newcomers.

The delicate antennae swayed silently back at them.

It was a little interplanetary misunderstanding: a sheriff, like everyone else, and perhaps most especially a sheriff, ought to be friendly enough to speak when he's spoken to, but the Ixians couldn't communicate except by their antennae. Otherwise, they might right now be receiving honors for concluding a successful expedition.

Having waved a cordial "How do you do?" with their antennae, they started moving off in the direction from which they'd come, back to-

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ward their ship, convinced that they could not pursue this investigation further and would have to mark the spot on their maps as a place to be avoided.

Ocie and Lee and Ranse moved with them, hands still in the air, but rapidly losing their peaceableness and patience. It was an odd procession. The Ixians, puzzled but still trudging, were zipping messages back and forth at the head, while the three men brought up a somewhat threshing tail—Ocie plump and looking plumper because he always stuffed things in his pockets, the other two long and lean and a little springy at the knees. The men were preoccupied with the affront of not having their greeting returned; and with their heads down to keep out the glare, they didn't even notice they were at the rear.

The sight of the grounded spaceship rubbed salt into their wounded feelings. "Wasting the taxpayers' money on newfangled swamp-buggies," Lee complained indignantly, "instead of spending it paving the roads."

"That's what comes of putting the wrong men in office," Ocie said. He'd been about to climb in the hatch, but he swung around abruptly. He was so mad he threw the first thing that came to hand—the funnel—against the side of the ship and didn't even notice how the antennae recoiled from the sharp sound.

"Sheriff," he said slowly, "there ain't *me,* nor nobody else in my family, ever going to vote for *you* again."

Darkness engulfed them inside the ship, and the only sound was of their own heavy breathing. It was a place where anyone who was going to have misgivings would have them, and Lee said, "I ain't so sure that was the sheriff. Looked a little different somehow."

"If they were federal men they should have said so," Ocie said, still hot under the collar. "By God, I'm going to ask them. They ain't got no right not to talk to me." He started up, but the ship lurched and it was too late then for doubt to rescue anybody. They blacked out as the ship took off.

A boxlike room with metal walls and no windows, a single door with grillwork, dim light over all—that was what the three saw when they came to. They raised themselves carefully to sitting positions and reached for the makings of cigarettes.

"'Tain't the county jail," Ocie said, authoritatively.

"It's some place," Ranse said, trying to hold the little cigarette paper steady in his hand, "that makes tobacco act like them Mexican jumping beans."

"Must be a federal prison," Lee said.

Ocie twisted the end of his cigarette slowly. "They can't put us in no federal prison—not without a fair

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trial, they can't." But the words were quiet; there was no strength left for fiery indignation.

It was at this moment that an Ixian appeared at the grillwork door. Silently and soberly they looked at it and saw a green creature with two heads and four legs and something sprouting from the top of the heads. A set of retractable arms reached out to grasp the grill as the creature pressed close to get a good look.

"Foreigners," Ocie said, over a dry throat.

"Enemies of the United States," Ranse concluded.

They'd been captured, that much they remembered. Usually they weren't. Among other reasons, they set up stills to show their spirit; they knew of the days when, it was said, every self-respecting man had a still, and by tradition they resented being told what to do or what not to do.

It was spirit that made them open their throats now, as they sat with their backs to the wall, and cut loose with the rebel yell; but it was fright that made their yell so fiendishly shrill.

There was nowhere for the shrieks to go except out the door, and there stood the green creature who couldn't talk, couldn't hear, except by means of his sensitive antennae.

The antennae recoiled, then started a long slow slide down the Ixian's foreheads. He fell away from the door and groped back to his companions. Hospitalized and nourished, he'd regain his faculties, but the wound was serious enough to put the green creatures on a split stick. Their instructions on leaving Ix had run more or less: Think. Think. Think. Establish satellite to revolve around earth, concealed from detection. Gather information by instrument from satellite and by trips to earth—analyze, correlate. Avoid provoking incident but take specimens when possible without arousing suspicion. Think. Think. Think.

They'd followed their instructions to the letter because obedience was second nature to them. It had happened that one of the ships sent out to explore had been accidentally brought to earth, and that some of the inhabitants had climbed aboard very willingly and accompanied them back to the base. As researchers they were inordinately pleased with the specimens; and with the inborn stubbornness of researchers, they didn't intend to be pried loose easily from the chance of gaining information from them. But the specimens had suddenly turned dangerous enough to put the whole undertaking in jeopardy.

They sent an urgent query back to Ix, asking what to do with the specimens, and decided that while waiting for an answer they would treat them with the great courtesy and respect due to the best thinkers, the greatest honor that could be accorded on Ix.

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By the time two more of the Ixians had suffered the loss of antennae, due to the rebel yell, they divined that these particular thinkers didn't like to do their thinking in a small locked room.

So the door of the cell swung open and Ocie, Lee, and Ranse settled their cowboy hats on their heads in a manner that spoke of grim determination, and walked out as though they had holsters at the hip. The Ixians bowed respectfully as they came.

"Looks like the googies is trying to be friendly," Ocie said. They'd taken to calling their captors the googies because of the sound the padded feet of the Ixians made when they walked—like walking in shoes full of water. But the sudden friendliness didn't turn their heads and they countered it by just touching their hands to the big brims of their hats; their eyes stayed watchful.

With pride gleaming through their deference, the Ixians showed them the large laboratory where they weighed, measured, analyzed, and recorded information about earth and its life. It didn't interest their newest specimens at all. They had no reason to recognize the results of the studies and looked with suspicion even at such simple things as the Ixian equivalents of Bunsen burners and calculators.

The gardens were better. The plants grew in something like soil and were irrigated by what might be water. The googies offered them food and they ate and found it filling. "This ain't bad," Ocie said. He was partial to sweets and starches and he was eating something that tasted awfully sweet, though it looked like eggplant, and something that looked like wheat but tasted like corn.

"I'd rather have me a dish of okra or turnip greens or black-eye peas," Lee said.

"There's a plenty, anyway," Ranse said. "We won't go hungry."

The food did lull them though, and made the shock of their next discovery that much worse. Urged persistently toward the scanner, they finally made out enough to realize that that was earth way down there. Then someone let out a low whistle that made the googies step back apprehensively.

Ocie pointed to the far-off earth and pointed to himself and the others and made motions of flying by flapping his arms. Relieved and happy, uncomprehending, the googies waved their antennae wildly in return.

"Looks like we're going to have to *fight* our way out of here," Ocie said.

"We fight our way out of here"—Ranse shook his head—"and we're in for a right smart *drop*."

The three returned to their cell by preference. They studied all around their problem but couldn't come up with a way of getting back to earth.

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"It never rains but it pours," Ocie said, searching his pockets. "Getting treed by a bunch of foreigners and now I don't know where my tobacco is at." He brought something out of his pocket but it wasn't tobacco. It was yeast, and then the plan came together, just naturally.

"Eggplant sweet as sugar," Lee said.

"Something that tastes like corn must *be* like corn," Ocie said.

"Plenty of equipment in that place where they work," Ranse said, getting up and pushing his hat back to a jaunty angle.

The Ixians were pleased to see their specimens making use of their facilities and settling down to study. They came over to watch whenever they could spare a minute from their own work, and admired the extremely careful attention the three gave to their operations. They felt a sort of dry-as-dust affinity for the experimenters, and hoped to learn a great deal.

They did. The result of the studies wasn't good but it was whisky—clear, scalding, and with powerful effect on the googies. "Why, they got a skinful," Ocie remarked in astonishment, "just from dipping their sprouts in the stuff."

And considerably later, Ranse said wearily, "I never seen anyone get such a *long* jag from just such a little."

Picture the poor Ixians, precision-workers of the cosmos, who always measured by the finest lines of the instrument, always calculated to more places than was necessary, always checked and rechecked results like little victims of compulsive behavior complexes—picture the Ixians, freed for the first time from the burden of being exact!

They sent Ix a report that earth was the most amazing thing they'd ever seen; that it doubled itself and bounced in its orbit; that it defied description; and, finally, that they couldn't bear to *think* about it. The ships that were supposed to go to earth would sometimes go there and sometimes just race each other through space like hot-rods.

Anxious queries ticked in from Ix, but all these were torn from the machine without being read, folded into miniature spaceships, and sent sailing. For the three master distillers the Ixians felt nothing but good will sprinkled with prankish affection, slapping them on the back with their antennae and tugging their big hats down over their eyes whenever they came near. So Ocie and the others forgot about trying to talk to them and stayed in their cell as much as possible.

"Well," Ocie said by way of consolation, "it was a good run, anyway."

"Yep," Lee said, "and it sure was nice not having to watch for the sheriff while we was cooking off."

"It sure was," Ranse said slowly, and by then the plan had come together, just naturally.

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"You can talk googie better than us," Lee said to Ocie. "You got more padding, so you can listen to them better. You can talk them into taking you down and bringing you back. It ain't as though they was losing us for good."

The understanding of the googies had expanded amazingly. They landed Ocie near the wreckage of the still and he signaled for them to wait, and drove off to town in the truck.

It was while he was in the store buying twenty cases of fruit jars that he had the bad luck to run into the sheriff. "Howdy, Ocie," the sheriff said. "That's a powerful lot of fruit jars for a single man to be buying."

"It sure enough is, Sheriff," Ocie said. "And I'll swear, that's just what I told my friend when he asked me to get them for him. But he's courting this widow woman and he's just got a notion that if he takes around these fruit jars, and some fruits and vegetables for her to put up in them, she'll just naturally ask him around to help eat them."

"I'm real glad to hear that, Ocie," the sheriff said. "Real glad. I'd sure hate to come along, just doing my duty, and find you using them jars for something illegal."

"If I was you I wouldn't waste no time looking, Sheriff," Ocie advised him honestly, "'cause you ain't likely to find me."

All the same, when Ocie went back on the satellite and told of the meeting, the three agreed they'd better delay the first delivery to earth while the sheriff had time to hunt and not find.

When they were finally ready to go, another batch was ready for cooking off. They instructed the googies in the intricate process and left three of them to tend to it. But they didn't realize what a fine time the googies were having being irresponsible for a change.

The Ixians landed them on earth again with their load and they transferred the fruit jars full of whisky from the ship to the truck and covered them with a tarpaulin. Lee and Ranse sat in the cab with Ocie, and the happy Ixians sat on the load and on the tailgate, swinging their legs. They liked the feeling of the cool dark air flowing by their antennae, and the unpredictable bouncing of the truck made the green creatures merry. They laughed at the way foliage and phone poles rushed into the beam of the right headlight and then vanished. There were things on earth they never knew existed.

The three Ixians left on the satellite suspected they were missing a lot of fun and took off to join the others. The fire under the cooker was left to itself.

A Highway Patrol car parked at an intersection signaled the truck to stop. "Your left headlight is out," the trooper said, coming up to them.

"Officer," Ocie said, "I'm aiming to get that fixed soon's I get to town."

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"Let's see your license," the trooper said sternly, playing his flashlight into the cab of the truck.

Ocie started searching his pockets. "I got it right here somewhere," he said.

The trooper took a step to the rear and played his flashlight over the back of the truck. The Ixians sparkled and shone in the beam. All those heads and legs were geen, glittering, and unnerving. But the Ixians saw only a man and they were full of good will toward men. Antennae whipped out to slap him on the back; arms reached out and pulled his big-brimmed trooper's hat down snugly over his eyes.

Ocie accelerated and took the next turnoff back the way they'd come.

There was a mysterious flash in the sky that night that some people are still wondering and talking about. But the three guessed what had happened when they found the googies who'd been left to tend the cooking-off waiting by the other ships.

"The still must have blowed up," Lee said.

"It must have blowed the whole place up with it," Ocie said, "and that's a pity 'cause that was a right nice spot. We ain't likely to find as pretty a one again soon."

"Maybe they can piece it together again," Ranse said, "afterwards. Right now, we got to get this stuff hid."

"We bury it under the road," Ocie said. "The law'll never think of looking for it there."

They'd only started to dig up the dirt road when the sound of approaching feet stopped them.

But it wasn't the Highway Patrol, nor the sheriff and his deputies, nor agents of the State Beverage Department or the Federal Alcohol Tax Unit. For the first time in Ixian history a police force had been sent out to bring back an expedition.

The police bowed slightly and began a rapid quizzing of the renegades with their antennae. Sobering, the googies answered falteringly; and sobered, they waved their antennae sadly toward their friends and took off obediently with their police.

The three returned to their digging.

"They'll probably just get fines, maybe suspended," Ocie said, trying not to feel so bad.

The sound of the shovels was all that was heard for a while; then Ocie said, "I ain't ordinarily a drinking man, but it'd be a shame to bury *all* these jars, after what we been through."

"It sure would," Lee said.

"It sure would," Ranse said.

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To my own taste, the four indispensable exports of Scotland are Drambuie, Mary Garden, the criminological essays of William Roughead, and the stories of J. T. McIntosh. The latest shipment from Aberdeen contains this tale of adventure, love, peril and zany humor:

The Sandmen

by J. T. McINTOSH

THE SHIP WAS COMING IN FOR A landing which was going to be disastrous.

Vic didn't know what the planet was, or exactly where, but that didn't matter because they had to land anyway. Only in the unlikely event of somebody's surviving the landing would the surface conditions become important.

Behind him, Eileen was humming "Voi che sapete" from *The Marriage of Figaro*.

"Going to have those tanks ready in time?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Ready now," said Eileen. "Of course you won't believe I've fixed them properly. I've only checked them five times."

Vic didn't answer. It was on account of a mistake Eileen had made that they were going to crash. It wasn't what Vic said about it that mattered, it was what Eileen felt herself. She hadn't quite gone to pieces, but it was clear she had lost all confidence in herself. She was permanently on the defensive not because she was being attacked, but because she felt she ought to be.

"That's six times now," said Eileen.

"OK." said Vic. "I guess they're all right now."

"Having been wrong the first five."

Vic didn't answer. But that wasn't good enough for Eileen. She had to bounce on her bed of nails. "Are you going to trust your life to something I've done?"

"The tanks won't make all that difference," said Vic. "I'm laying my head on the lap of the gods, not yours. Have you had time to take a look at this planet, in between checking the tanks six times?"

"I think we should be able to live on it," she said. "But don't pay any attention to what I think. I guess I'm wrong, as usual."

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"Snap out of it, Eileen," said Vic, turning to look at her.

She flushed, fully aware that she was acting like a fool but unable to stop herself.

"Better get into your tank," he said. "We've got about three minutes."

Eileen unclasped her belt, unfastened the top button of her tunic, then stopped.

"Even though we're probably going to die in three minutes," she said breathlessly, "I'd rather you didn't look while I take off my clothes, if you don't mind."

Vic shrugged and turned back to the controls. In one of the glass dials he saw a tiny Eileen stripping off her overalls and inserting herself into one of the two crash tanks. She had gotten some breath from somewhere and was humming "Una voce poco fa" from *The Barber of Seville.*

For women on spaceships there were only two courses open. Either they treated kisses like handshakes and copulation like kisses, or they pretended, hard, twenty-four hours a day, that they weren't women at all.

It was an interesting thought that if he and Eileen should happen to survive and find the planet livable-on, Eileen could hardly go on pretending that she wasn't a woman.

"Una voce poco fa" ceased abruptly as Eileen's tank closed.

Vic didn't wait much longer. He took a last look at the controls, stripped naked, got into the other tank and put the breathing-tube in his mouth.

The instant before the ship struck, the tube would be jerked out of his mouth and the contents of the tank would become a very remarkable jelly which would act like twenty thousand cushions. Once all was still, and it would be eventually, the tank would gently release Vic and Eileen, or what was left of them, back into the control cabin, where, with luck, there would be some air which they could breathe.

The crash tanks had no provision for anesthesia. It had been tried, but in circumstances like these it lost far more lives than it saved. Vic was fully conscious in his tank, though he could hear, see, smell and taste nothing, as he waited for the crash.

He waited a thousand lifetimes. The crash was never going to come.

More days, years, centuries passed.

And at last, when he had given up believing that the ship would ever get down, the tube was pulled from his mouth and Vic's small world exploded.

*

Vic wasn't allowed any time to think. The curtain went up like a rocket.

He was in a busy street with about five million other people, being pushed, jostled, hurried onwards. His first impression was of heat and naked flesh and bright colors and *vastness.*

He didn't know what had happened five minutes before. There

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wasn't any five minutes before. His life started right there, bang, this is it.

It was anybody's guess what he was supposed to be—tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor . . .

He paused for a second, trying to orient himself. And it was only for a second.

A hard shoulder with a lot of weight behind it crashed into him. Vic staggered and almost fell.

He got his balance, turned and looked back resentfully.

A huge man naked to the waist and carrying a heavy, ugly-looking whip faced him. "On your way, son," said the man with the whip, not unkindly. "The next time I tell you it'll be with this." He gestured with the whip.

Vic felt like telling him to go and play somewhere else. Something stopped him: common sense.

A man who hadn't existed five minutes ago was in no position to argue with reality. Reality in the shape of a vast slave-driver with a whip. Reality in *any* shape.

For that matter, a man who hadn't existed five minutes ago was in no position to argue with fantasy. Which this set-up definitely was.

That he was in some kind of a dream was obvious. Even if everything about him was as real as it seemed to be, he was still in a dream —his or somebody else's.

A film producer's dream, for example.

The people were tanned but technically white. Their clothes were negligible and what they did wear wasn't where Vic would have expected it to be. The street was paved with great stone slabs. The houses and buildings lining it were vast and clean and white.

There were no cars, no carts, no animals, nothing but men, women and children on foot and all going in the same direction, herded by dozens of huge slave-drivers with leather whips.

While everything about Vic was real, it wasn't quite sharp. The whole scene was just out of focus. Vic closed his eyes tightly once or twice and shook his head violently, but the scene refused to come into sharp focus.

Someone behind him was humming "Stridono lassù" from *Pagliacci*. Vic turned his head.

He didn't know her. He had no idea why it had occurred to him that he might. She was very pretty, but there was something far more important than that about her—she alone of all the thousands of people he could see was in sharp focus. She was like a three-dimensional figure against a two-dimensional background.

Three-dimensional was right. She was dressed like the other women in scraps of clothing which concealed areas of the body normally revealed on any beach and left bare the areas which, even on a beach, were invariably covered.

Vic had a fleeting thought that it

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was almost as if those clothes were designed for another race with different physical functions.

"Where are we?" he asked, dropping back into step with her.

She stopped singing. "I don't know," she said, troubled.

"Hell, you must know where we are."

"Then *you* do," she retorted, "and I wish you'd tell me."

This was getting Vic nowhere.

More than anything else he wanted to stop and think. He was sure that if he could only sit down somewhere for a while and consider things, everything would come back to him. But he and the girl were still being jostled onwards, and Vic had no pressing desire to clash with any of the overseers.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Allura," she said, after a pause. "What's yours?"

That was a point. "Oh, Jack, I guess," he said. "Look—there's our chance."

Just ahead was a dark alley past which the hurrying crowds lapped like waves. Vic seized Allura's arm and dragged her to the edge of one of these waves.

As they came level with the entrance of the alley he pulled her with him and they darted through.

They found themselves in a large, cool courtyard. Vic relaxed gratefully. For the first time since he had arrived in this dream world he had time to think.

He proceeded to waste it. "You know, that outfit you're wearing isn't only indecent, it's downright ugly," he remarked.

Allura looked down at herself and stiffened in shock. She made frantic movements which Vic interpreted as an attempt to be decently dressed. Vic suddenly realized he didn't know how he was dressed either. He looked down, and it was as big a shock to him as it had been to Allura.

Something whistled through the air and Allura screamed and ceased being concerned about anything but the pain in her back. Two seconds later Vic screamed too as the lash bit into his flesh. He hadn't known he could scream, but he could. He jumped back.

Allura had fallen in a heap, aware of nothing but the searing agony in her back.

"Get up," said the guard dispassionately, and stirred her with his foot.

Less concerned over the injury to Allura than the pain in his own back, Vic threw himself wildly at the guard.

He never reached him.

* *

The curtain went up like a rocket.

Vic was in Brooklyn, New York, and he knew he'd never been in Brooklyn before. He did know, however, exactly what he was doing.

He was calling on a man called Rudy Scheiner. When he found Scheiner he'd be friendly and harmless until Scheiner turned his back,

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when Vic would shoot him in the back.

Vic didn't know why he was going to kill Scheiner, he didn't know anything but that. It was enough. He knew what he had to do, and how to do it, and that he *could* do it. Though he didn't know the motives, he did know the situation.

Vic had an idea that he hadn't always been so fortunate.

It was a relief to have things so easy, so straightforward. This wasn't real, of course. It couldn't be. You didn't go unerringly through a city you didn't know to a house you didn't know to kill a man you didn't know.

It was a situation, that was all—a situation without explanation, without reason, without motive, without consequence.

Vic went up in the elevator, turned left in the corridor. Just before thumbing the button of apartment 47 he hesitated, worried by something.

Now that he thought of it, he couldn't remember anything about the entrance of the building, the hall, the elevator. He shook his head impatiently. He hadn't been interested in the building, the hall, the elevator—why should he notice them?

He pressed the button and the door opened.

His jaw dropped and he gaped as if he had never seen a woman before.

She shouldn't be in the picture. She had no right to be there. There were no lines for her, no stage directions. It was like meeting a cigarette-girl in *Macbeth*.

She wore casual—very casual—lounging pajamas. A little jacket which was nominally white, but really wasn't opaque enough to have any color, was knotted below her breasts, and the slacks were of the same misty material.

The most unexpected thing was that he knew her.

She was waiting for him to say something.

"Rudy in?" he asked.

"He didn't tell me anything about you," she said. "I only live here."

"He couldn't tell you anything about me," Vic said carefully, "because he didn't know I was coming to see him."

She shrugged and stood aside. As he followed her through the lounge onto a balcony, she was softly singing Schumann's "Du bist wie eine Blume."

"Rudy's in the tub," she said over her shoulder. "He won't be long."

She spoke and acted like what she was evidently supposed to be—Rudy Scheiner's mistress. But Vic knew that was as false as her walk as the way she acted as the way she was dressed as the name she would give when he asked her . . .

"What's your name?" he asked.

"What's it to you?" she countered, dropping face-down on a divan. "What am I to you?"

"A rose by another name," he retorted, "which doesn't smell quite as sweet."

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"Well, can I help it if I have to . . ." she began resentfully.

"If you have to what?"

"You blame me for everything ever since . . ."

"Ever since what?" Vic prompted again, with the same negative result.

"I'm Margo," she said ungraciously.

"Margo what? Is it too much trouble to think up another name?"

"You're nuts," she said, and turned her face away as if that finished it.

Vic moved across to stand over her. "Things being as they are," he murmured, "I wonder what'll happen if I . . . ?"

He put his hands underneath her, on her ribs, and lifted her easily, spinning her as he did so. He caught her round the waist and their lips met.

Yes, she was real. There wasn't the faintest shadow of doubt about that. The flesh against him was hot, dry, firm, and it did to him all the things it might be expected to do.

Margo didn't struggle. That was a surprise. If he knew anything about her, it was that she'd struggle when somebody kissed her. When *anybody* kissed her.

"Let me go," she whispered, her arms and her body saying exactly the opposite. "Let me go. Rudy . . ."

Vic laid her gently back on the divan. Yes, Rudy.

You had to pander to three-dimensional madness. You couldn't say: This can't be true, therefore it isn't true, and I'll ignore it. He'd learned that already.

Besides, you could never tell what reality might be mixed up in fantasy. A man dreaming and knowing he was dreaming could still be shot by a man standing over his sleeping body.

"What do you want with Rudy?" Margo whispered.

"Does it matter?"

"It might," she said significantly, "afterwards."

Well, that was interesting.

Vic hadn't time to think about it, however, for Rudy came in just then, small, fat, bald . . .

Rudy had no face. He didn't have anything to replace a face, either. He was simply blank, like an unaddressed envelope.

"Hi, Rudy," said Vic, moving over to him. "I've got something for you."

Behind Vic, Margo was quietly humming Grieg's "Ich liebe dich."

Since Rudy didn't even have a face there didn't seem to be much reason why Vic shouldn't shoot him in the back as he was supposed to do.

Vic couldn't do it, nevertheless. Instead, he hit Rudy on the side of the head with the butt of the gun and Rudy dropped quietly in a heap.

Vic turned to Margo. "You said something about afterwards," he remarked.

"You were supposed to shoot him in the back," she said, puzzled.

"Well, I didn't," said Vic. "Does it matter?"

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Apparently it didn't. She didn't care any more than he had cared about Rudy-with-no-face. She didn't even look down at him.

As Vic took her in his arms she was humming "Ich liebe dich" again.

* * *

No, those asterisks don't mean what they usually mean.

Vic was conscious that he'd been robbed, but he didn't know who had robbed him of what.

He didn't know where he had just been, or what he'd been doing, or if he had been doing anything.

He was hacking his way through an impossible hothouse world which looked as if it was meant to be Venus, but which obviously wasn't Venus.

Sweating in the moist, clammy heat, he told himself that a man who saw things which weren't, couldn't be there was nuts.

Therefore he was nuts.

He *felt* perfectly sane—hot, sweating, tired, but perfectly sane. It seemed to him that everything else was crazy and he was sane.

Though he knew perfectly well that a lot of nuts felt that way, it didn't help. He couldn't believe he was out of his mind, no matter how hard he tried.

All right, then, suppose just for a moment that he was sane. A sane man in a hallucination—if that wasn't a contradiction in terms—ought to have some control over things. He ought to be able to make things happen the way he wanted them to happen, see things he wanted to see.

Vic hacked away a screen of long, steaming grasses and found himself facing a girl.

He didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but felt that one of these two reactions was called for. The girl was beautiful, naturally, and she wore, equally naturally, a candy-striped blouse and the shortest of shorts.

"Thank heaven I've found you!" the girl gasped. "The station's gone. The giant tarantulas are eating up the—"

"For Pete's sake!" Vic exclaimed. "Forget the giant tarantulas. All that crap may be in the script, but you don't have to say it, do you?"

"I might have known," she said bitterly, "that you'd blame it all on me."

"I'm not blaming anything on you. I just said forget the giant tarantulas. What do you call yourself this time?"

"This time?" she exclaimed.

"Never mind. What's your name, then?"

"Carol Jones. I—"

He took her arm. She was still panting and trembling with fear. He didn't hold it against her. There weren't any giant tarantulas, of course, but she was terrified by the very idea, as a woman can be terrified of a non-existent mouse.

"Never mind the tarantulas," he said soothingly. "If they come after

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you I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow them away. Let's work this out, you and me."

She was puzzled, frightened, on the verge of flight.

"Assuming we're sane," Vic said, "at least, assuming I'm sane, honey —I don't know about you, you're real but I've got no guarantee that you're sane—we should be able to see our way through this . . . this . . ."

He stopped. "That's just it," he mused. "What is it? Not a dream. No, not a dream."

He looked at her candy-striped blouse. He could see the blue stripes, the texture of the material, the very threads, the movement under it. Dreams weren't like that. Not ordinary dreams.

"Suppose . . ." he murmured, "suppose somebody is doing this to us?"

At that there was a slow but definite change in the girl beside him. A light seemed to go on in her, dim at first, then stronger.

"Yes," she said slowly. "Suppose somebody is. There would have to be a purpose, wouldn't there?"

"One would think so," Vic agreed.

"Punishment?" she suggested. "Punishment for something we've done wrong?"

"For the *n*th time," said Vic, exasperated, "that's finished as far as I'm concerned. You made a mistake, sure. I've made mistakes too, more than you, because I've lived a few years longer than you. You didn't make any other mistakes this trip, and it was just our bad luck that . . ."

His voice trailed away, because he no longer knew what he was talking about. Carol didn't know either.

There was a pause. Carol began softly to hum "N'est-ce plus ma main" from *Manon*.

"What else could it be if it isn't punishment?" Vic said.

"Therapy?"

"But we just decided we were sane."

"Then . . . some kind of test," said the girl thoughtfully.

"Who could be testing us? Testing us in what, for what?"

There they stuck. The idea that they were in some kind of test certainly seemed more likely than the others. But who could be testing them, where, why, for what, and how?

They couldn't even guess.

"I don't think we should be waiting here," said the girl uneasily. "I've got an idea that this time something's going to happen. Something we won't like—"

She was looking back over her shoulder as she spoke.

She screamed.

When he looked in the same direction Vic felt like screaming too, but he held Carol's arm and wouldn't let her run. She struggled. He put his arm round her and made her face the horror which was approaching.

"Carol," he said urgently. "They're

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not really there. They can't be there. Look again. Try to . . ."

Inspiration struck him.

"Carol, what color are they?" he demanded.

"Brown," she whispered.

"I see them blue!" he exclaimed. "How many are there?"

"Four."

"Seven," he corrected. "How tall are they?"

"Nine feet."

"Mine are at least twelve. Carol, we're in the same dream, but we can't even agree on it. You see? It's—"

"But they're still coming," Carol screamed, tugging at him frantically.

"No, they're not," Vic said. "Not really. They can't do us any harm, Carol."

He was wrong. The giant tarantulas tore them to pieces and ate them up.

* * * *

The curtain went up again. This time he was in Arctic clothing, trudging through the snow.

Every time he knew more. Vaguely he was aware that he was in one of many fantastic episodes. And though he never remembered anything about the others, he knew more each time about what must be happening.

He was being tested, examined, treated. By whom or for what purpose he still had no idea.

He knew that the situation he found himself in each time was unreal, with real elements in it.

One thing he wanted very much to know, and didn't, was whether there really was space-travel, as he believed. If he lived on an Earth in which space hadn't been conquered, he must assume he was being tested by man, by human psychologists.

In which case he was certainly insane.

If, however, men had really ventured out to the planets, to the stars, he might be being tested, examined, manipulated, analyzed, by some sort of aliens who could make him dream to order.

Sandmen.

Intelligent beings who could make him see what wasn't there and make him forget anything they wanted him to forget.

Well, if that was the situation, there might be a way to beat them. He might be able to take some control over his own dreams.

Over that ridge, he told himself, he would find a spaceship. A little ship which would take him away from this world.

He pictured it, constructed it in his mind, as he trudged slowly on.

He came to the rise, looked over—and the ship was there, exactly as he'd pictured it.

Instead of triumph he felt doubt, uncertainty.

Had he really *made* that ship, or had he somehow known it was in this dream?

He couldn't be sure. He couldn't be sure of anything.

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Anyway, if that was a spaceship, there was only one thing to do.

Down the slope he went, unhurried, careful. Halfway to the ship he had a sudden fear that it would dissolve in mist as he approached it, or keep its distance so that no matter how far he walked it would never be any nearer to him.

Nothing of that sort occurred. He reached the ship, climbed into the airlock, made his way to the control room and shed his heavy clothing.

Without wasting any time over it he prepared for takeoff. Everything worked smoothly.

In half an hour he was off.

In two hours he was well out in space.

It was only then that he realized what a fool he had been, how futile what he was doing was.

A ship constructed in a dream must be a dream ship. He could no more escape in such a phantom ship than a man in prison could escape by smoking opium.

Control over dreams, even if he had it, was no use. He had to have control over reality.

Besides, there was the girl. He didn't know her name, couldn't remember what she looked like. But he knew she existed, and that she was in the same trouble as himself.

He had to go back for her.

How, in a particularly realistic dream, did you wake up?

How did you find the truth when you were in an environment which you knew was quite unreal?

Vic had an idea. He went on a tour of the ship.

Nothing in it was a surprise to him. On the other hand, many things he saw were quite marvelous.

The air-circulation pipes in a ship which seldom knew gravity, and hence density, were the work of years of experiment. The humidity control was not only brilliantly effective, it was dazzingly simple, a condensation labyrinth beside which a car's cooling system was vast, clumsy and immensely complicated. Every handhold was just precisely where it was needed, as if generations of spacemen had swarmed about the ship in free fall adjusting every one until there were as many as were needed, no more, each in the right position to a millimeter.

Nobody could have *imagined* such a ship, unless he knew, knew intimately, another just like it.

Certainly no non-human, no matter how intelligent, could have worked it out.

Therefore space-travel, if not this particular ship, was a reality. Vic had been able to imagine this ship because he knew others, real spaceships.

And it was the more likely that Vic's working theory was correct, that he was being tested in dreams by non-human Sandmen on an unknown world.

The girl, then, must be another crew member, another prisoner of the Sandmen.

But what could he *do*? Probably

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both of them were lying in a pressurized tank somewhere while they imagined themselves trudging through snow, taking off in spaceships, and all the other wild things they'd been doing in all the other crazy dreams.

Vic spoke:

"I assume you can hear and understand me. I know I'm still somewhere on the surface of your world. I know there's a girl, too . . ."

He paused. Nothing happened. It seemed crazy to talk thus, alone on a spaceship a million miles out in space.

The natural thing for the Sandmen to do would be to find out all that he and the girl knew and then destroy them—or, if the Sandmen knew a method of doing it, pickle them until they should be needed again.

"Your race and mine have nothing in common," Vic said, wondering if it was true. "Let us go and tell our people what we know of you *now*. Don't wait until we know so much about you that you'll never be able to release us at all."

The spaceship about him shivered. Someone in control of the dream was jittery. Or perhaps it was Vic who was jittery. He had to control a momentary uneasiness before he could go on.

He didn't go on. He knew suddenly, clearly, that he wasn't getting through to the Sandmen. He was talking into a vacuum.

It was like talking on a phone when the line is dead. There doesn't have to be a click—you know somehow when you have been cut off.

Not that Vic had been cut off. He'd never been connected. It was no use trying to talk to the Sandmen like that.

At the thought he became uneasy. If he couldn't even talk to the Sandmen . . .

He was in a ship which didn't exist. If the ship was false, so was his impression that he was in space. Nevertheless, he found himself acutely uncomfortable at the thought of the ship's dissolving about him.

Before he did anything else, he wanted to be out of space—real or imaginary space.

He maneuvered the ship so that it pointed back the way it had come. He couldn't see any details of the planet he was returning to. It was a planet with no face.

* * * * *

Abruptly, and briefly, Vic was out of the dreams altogether. He didn't know how he knew that, but he knew it.

He could see nothing, feel nothing, hear nothing. For a moment of terror he thought the ship really had dissolved about him and left him in empty space.

Almost instantly, however, he realized he was breathing air. And as he listened intently he heard his own breathing.

More than that, he heard someone else's breathing.

It was like being in a cinema

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during a breakdown. Perhaps the dreams had run off the reel.

Suddenly he realized the most important thing about this episode.

For once, he knew all that had happened. He remembered the slave-driving sequence, the Brooklyn episode, the crazy Venusian scene, the takeoff in the snow. He knew that Allura was Margo was Carol. He suspected that she was someone else, not Allura nor Margo nor Carol.

He wanted to say her name, sure that she was near him in the darkness. He spent ten frantic seconds trying to remember her real name.

Then it was too late. He turned his head. There was light, and he was drawn into it.

* * * * *

This was at once ecstasy and agony, unbearable ecstasy and unbearable agony. It was something more than physical yet at the same time as grossly animal as anything could be. In its violence it was beautiful and terrifying, in its serenity it was infinitely desirable yet searing, burning.

It was all the success of a form of life which strove eternally towards higher things, and all the failure of a form of life chained to an animal existence.

It was sex.

It was every woman who had ever lived and loved, and every man. It was every childbirth, every wish to procreate. The highest, noblest love which had ever existed was there, and the ugliest, lowest sadism.

Time didn't exist in this dream. At once, together, Vic loved all the women he could ever possibly love, all the women there were to love. He possessed them all, because he wasn't just Vic; he was all men.

He loved all women and was jealous of all women, all men. Some he hated, and in one blinding glimpse he understood how close love and hate were, like opposite sides of the same coin.

Perversion was there too, the ugliness that made normality beautiful.

Yet even in the middle of sex so strong, so sweet, so pure, so painful, so perverse, he realized for perhaps the first time how much more in life there was than sex.

This whole vast, frenetic scene was only a small part of a big picture. He knew that by the importance of the things he looked for and couldn't find in it.

One thing he did know. Whoever was responsible for this dream, it was a masterpiece.

It was fading, and as it faded he tried to hold on to it, tried not to let it go.

He failed.

* * * * * * *

Someone was singing "Gretchen am Spinnrade." At least he thought so, but whenever he actually listened, the sound faded.

He was deposited gently on the floor of the control-room.

The corner of his eye showed him violent activity. He turned his head.

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A naked girl was frantically attempting not to be naked. Pulling on her slacks she let her tunic drift away from her, and as she made a grab for it before it floated to the far corner of the room the movement began to draw her slowly out of her slacks again. She settled for the slacks and let the tunic go for the moment.

"Relax," said Vic. "I'm in my birthday suit too."

This didn't appear to comfort Eileen. She tried to turn her back to him, but that isn't easy in free fall, and it was thirty seconds or so before she got organized, recaptured her tunic and got it on.

By that time Vic had had time to sense the difference between this and the dreams.

Less concerned about his nudity than Eileen had been, he rolled over carefully and got into his own clothes.

"They've let us go," he said incredulously. "They've let us go!"

Eileen, clad now, had attention to spare for other things. "Maybe," she said. "Let's see if there's any fuel. If the engines work."

Vic saw now that Eileen was Allura and Margo and Carol. She wasn't quite as pretty as any of them, but she could be if she tried.

He remembered the dreams and before them all he remembered his whole life up to the landing. But there was nothing since except the dreams. He hadn't seen a square inch of the planet, hadn't had a glimpse of any of its inhabitants.

"We must have passed their test," he murmured. "Either that or we failed so badly they decided we were harmless. What do you remember, Eileen?"

"I remember it was my fault we crashed," she said bleakly. "I'd forgotten that for a while."

"Hell, you never forget that," said Vic. "You've got a guilt complex. Never mind that now. There are more important things."

"More important things?" she asked incredulously.

"Sure—and before we get to the question of what's been happening to us, there's another important thing to be settled."

He pushed off and caught her in his arms.

He had expected Margo to struggle, and she hadn't. Eileen didn't struggle either. She really came to life in his arms, like Galatea.

Later they inspected the ship. They found that it had been extensively damaged, which was no surprise, and that it had been repaired so that it was as good as new.

As good as new—no better. Everything had been restored exactly as it had been before. Which suggested that the Sandmen were good mechanics but not necessarily brilliant scientists.

"When I make a mess of a ship," said Eileen, "I really do a job on it. Looks as if there was about point five percent of us left after we landed."

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Vic took her in his arms again. In a dim way he understood the psychology of her guilt feeling.

Now the best thing Vic could do for her was to show her that her destiny in life was to be a desirable woman, not a super-efficient crewman.

"But I can't understand those tests," Vic mused, his arms still round Eileen. "What on earth could our reactions in those crazy situations tell them? Our part in them wasn't all that important, we weren't faced with choices—"

"Assuming they were tests," said Eileen, not trying to escape, "we don't know how an alien race would test us. What were tests to them wouldn't necessarily look like tests to us."

"That's true," said Vic. "And they certainly don't look like tests to us. They were situations, but fixed, almost static—not problem situations."

They went back to the control-room, still talking.

Immediately they entered it Vic saw something they'd missed—a piece of paper stuck to the wall. He pulled it off.

It was in English, in a strange but readable script.

Eyes scanning rapidly ahead, Vic read in a monotone: "*'We did not wish you to see us . . . we are not of your race, though you would call us humanoid . . . we did not think your race and ours had much in common, but we were wrong. Our mental processes appear similar.*"

He stopped reading aloud in order to scan the note more quickly.

"What does it say?" demanded Eileen impatiently.

"It seems they always meant to repair our ship and send us on our way like this," said Vic, still trying to read on while he was explaining what he'd found out. "They didn't have to *test* us—they have a way of taking down everything in a mind like making a phonograph record. We were unconscious when they found us and they kept us unconscious while they repaired—"

"You mean—they didn't mean us to dream at all? But that's impossible."

"*'We must apologize for the unfortunate mistake. . . . We should have guessed that your minds might translate concepts which we were sure they could not understand into others which they could—'*"

He stopped again and read on.

Suddenly Vic laughed. "Yes, they're right—our races are different," he said. "It never occurred to them to destroy us, or harm us in any way. They simply kept us safe while they repaired our ship. This letter is an apology for the mental torture we may have suffered."

"The dreams?"

"They weren't dreams."

"Then what were they?"

"While they were repairing our ship," said Vic slowly, "they left us in a—well . . ." He read again: "*'. . . what you would call a picture gallery.'*"

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Now it is spring in Brooklyn, and not for many months will that strange regional cry, which has been transcribed as waidle necksyeer, *ring hauntingly in the autumnal air. Now, while the baseball season is young and hearts are confident, we present this touching tribute to the single-minded loyalty of Brooklyn rooters, feelingly written by Will Stanton, who resides in Chagrin Falls.*

Dodger Fan

by WILL STANTON

"SOME VACATION." JEROME SNAPPED off the TV. "All year I look forward to a little rest and relaxation. And what happens? The first game we lose on an error and a wild pitch—twelve innings. Game two is rained out. Today we get our hits—grand total."

Cleo, his wife, unwrapped a fresh stick of gum. "Five hits," she said. "Campy two, Duke one—"

"Who cares?" He walked to the window and looked out disgustedly. "You call that baseball?" He picked up his hat and headed for the door. "Some vacation."

"Erskine pitches tomorrow," Cleo said.

"Tomorrow the President could pitch," Jerome said, "I wouldn't be watching." He left the apartment and headed down the street. After a couple of blocks he hesitated and then stepped back and looked up at the gold sign. He couldn't remember seeing it before.

WANT TO VISIT MARS? STEP INSIDE.

Jerome stepped inside. He hadn't been going anyplace in particular. The man behind the counter was very friendly.

"Glad to have you aboard," he said. "You're the first to come in all day and I was beginning to wonder. You see I took a special course in Earth Psychology, so this is of great interest to me. What prompted you to visit Mars?"

"I just wanted to get out of town," Jerome said, "Detroit, Baltimore, Mars—it don't make any special difference."

"I graduated with honors, you know, from the Academy of Earthly Advertising and Customer Response. I was groomed for this job. So naturally your reaction—"

"If you got a trip to Philly, I'll

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take that," Jerome said. "Anything so I don't have to hear about that crummy outfit they call a ball club. Mars is OK."

"I see. You understand the trip would be brief. We must depend on the space-warp continuum which will be effective for only six more days. We would have to leave at once."

"It's my vacation," Jerome said. "I can do what I want."

When he stepped down on Mars, all of the big wheels were waiting. The Chairman of Lions Interplanetary, the Editor of Martian Digest, the head of the Future Voters' League, and others. The welcoming address was delivered by the President of the Solar Council.

"In conclusion," he said, "at this first meeting of the dominant cultures of the planetary system, may I extend to you, Jerome of Earth, the keys to our cities and the hearts of our people, in the fervent hope—"

Jerome had taken a pair of clippers from his pocket and was trimming his nails. "Likewise," he said.

"—in the fervent hope," said the President, "that the civilizations we represent may gain by this association some insight—"

"Looks like a mighty nice little planet you've got here," Jerome said.

After the ceremonies there was a small banquet at the Palace with some informal entertainment, and somewhat later Jerome was installed in the visitor's suite. He slept well.

The next morning he was treated to a gala patio breakfast with the Royal Martian Ballet performing on the terrace below. "You are surprised to feel so much at home," said the President, smiling. "You see, we have been listening to your radio for many years, and so have learned your language, your customs, your likes and dislikes—"

"I like my eggs over easy," Jerome said. "But these are OK." He poked at them politely with his fork. "Anyhow, it's a change."

"We have planned so long for this occasion," said the President, "to show you our way of life, only to find our time so short—"

"Why don't we just drive around for a while," said Jerome. "If you got a car?"

They visited the Bureau of Statistical Research and Loving Kindness, and the Criminal Building, and Jerome left his footprints in concrete at the Sanctorium of the Daughters of the Martian Revolution.

"Actually," said the President, "the Revolution never amounted to much, but these ladies are the daughters of it and they're quite well to do. Now this afternoon—"

"As long as it's my vacation," said Jerome, "let's take in a ball game."

"First of all there is the Memorial Service of the Young Republicans' Club and then—" He paused. "A ball game you say. Yes." He seemed to be thinking. "Very well, then, suppose we begin by having a bite of lunch."

There were fourteen courses with

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appropriate wines and Solar Cola, so the luncheon was rather long. Long enough for the Martian Engineers and the Royal Construction Corps to erect a triple-decked stadium, and for two baseball teams to learn the game by means of micro-wave hypnosis. And for 120,000 volunteer fans to receive a short treatment of mass-suggestion. Jerome and the President arrived at the park and took their seats. The umpire dusted off home plate, the first baseman took a chew of tobacco, the batter knocked the dirt out of his spikes and the game began.

In the first inning there was a triple play and a triple steal. One of the managers was thrown out and the umpire was hit by a pop-bottle. Jerome frowned. "I only wish Cleo was here," he said.

"You miss her a great deal," said the President.

"She never did see an ump get flattened," he said. "Not from this close anyhow."

In the second inning there was an inside-the-park grand slam home run, the third baseman made a triple error, and Jerome caught a pop foul. "Pretty fair seats," he said.

Returning to the Palace, the President outlined the rest of the day's schedule. "We're having a cocktail party in your honor," he said, "followed by a state dinner and the premiere of a new opera. Then a reception and a masked ball—"

"I thought I'd turn in early tonight," Jerome said. "Have a sandwich and a beer in my room and read the baseball almanac awhile."

"A sandwich and a beer in your room," said the President, "I see. Well, there should be beer in the icebox. If there's any special kind of sandwich you'd like we can stop at a delicatessen—"

"No special kind," Jerome said. The car turned in at the Palace.

The second morning was as busy as the first. The Tri-Centennial Military Review and Air Command Proceedings took up most of it so there was barely time to visit the Museum of Metaphysics and Household Design before lunch.

"This afternoon," said the President over the soup, "we have a program of unusual interest—"

"Who's pitching?" Jerome asked.

The Royal Construction Corps was forced to call on its civilian reserve to help rebuild the stadium it had torn down the night before. No one on Mars had considered the possibility that anybody would want to see more than one baseball game.

Driving home after the game the President smiled. "Nothing wrong with a little relaxation, is there? Especially since tomorrow is going to be our big day. Something like your Independence Day: the Annual Opening of the Canals, address by the Philosopher-in-Chief, Dedication of the Five Hundredth Congress of Scientific—"

"Sounds great," said Jerome. "Be playing a double-header, I presume?"

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"—of Scientific and Cultural Evalua—" The President paused. "A double-header, you say. Well, yes—naturally. If you'll excuse me a moment I have to make a phone call." He was in time. They had only ripped out the first three rows of seats.

Returning to the Palace the third day, Jerome seemed restless. "Nice of you to ask me up," he said, "and all, but I'd better be getting home."

"There are still two days," the President said. "It will be years before conditions will enable us to communicate with Earth again. There is much we have to give you: a cure for the common cold—the formula for universal peace—plans for a thirty-five-inch color TV set the average boy can build for ten dollars—"

"I wouldn't mind staying on," Jerome said, "I'd like to see that little southpaw pitch tomorrow, but I got to get home. I promised Cleo I'd pick up the laundry for one thing—"

"We had envisioned an exchange program," said the President, "of specialized personnel. Some of us going to Earth—some of you coming here."

"We could use a left-handed pitcher," Jerome said. "Probably we could give you a pretty good third baseman."

The President nodded. "At a moment like this there isn't very much I can say."

The trip to earth was uneventful. Jerome was glad to be home. He hurried up to the apartment. Cleo was sitting in the same chair, watching the game.

"What inning?" he asked.

"Last of the third, no score," she said. "Been away?"

"Yeah." He settled down on the couch. "Newcombe pitching, huh?"

She nodded. "Got his fast ball working pretty good. Where'd you go—Canarsie?"

"Mars," he said. He started to unlace his shoes. "Campy's thumb bother him any?"

"Still got it taped, but he's swinging OK." She unwrapped a stick of gum. "What's it like up there—nice?"

"Yeah," he said, "seemed like a pretty good crowd, what I saw of them. What did Reese do last time up?"

"Grounded to short," she said. "Why don't you come to the meeting Thursday—the Current Events Club? Give a little talk about them? Might be interesting."

Jerome went up to the set and adjusted the dial. "Talk about who?"

"Now you got it too dark," she said. "Talk about these friends you went to see. Up to Mars. They worthwhile getting to know?"

Jerome shook his head slowly. "Can't hit the curve ball," he said.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

C. S. LEWIS HAS LONG BEEN NOTED as an exceedingly acute lay theologian of the Church of England who has cast much of his theological writing in the form of science fiction or fantasy. The results have been excellent entertainment, whatever one's religious beliefs (or even disbeliefs); but many niceties are lost upon readers who do not share Mr. Lewis' Christian, and specifically Catholic, doctrines, and the whole has seemed at times too instructively schematized to qualify absolutely as art.

Even these slight reservations, however, cease to apply to the latest Lewis novel, TILL WE HAVE FACES (Harcourt, Brace, $4.50)—a profoundly moral and spiritual work, but treating directly the relation of man to his gods outside of the diagram of any specific theology, as richly meaningful to Moslem or Mormon as to members of the author's own Church.

Lewis has, he tells us, been contemplating and preparing this "myth retold" (as it is subtitled) for most of his life. The result is his major work to date: beautifully written, deeply characterized, surging in narrative. The myth is that of Cupid and Psyche, the god and the beloved mortal who is tempted into distrusting curiosity; but the central character in this version is not Psyche, but Orual, the sister who tempts her. Out of spiteful envy, says the ancient version; but no writer knows better than the creator of Screwtape the infinite subtlety and complexity of human motives.

The setting, magnificently realized, is a barbaric kingdom of northern Europe at a time (roughly the fourth century B.C.) when "dark idolatry and pale enlightenment [are] at war with each other and with vision." Fittingly, the story is by turns barbaric, enlightened and visionary, leading the princess Orual (ugly, sensitive and powerful) through a stirring life of intrigue and battles, never understanding yet ever haunted by her guilt until the ultimate moment of self-recognition.

For the meaning of the title is indeed that of the ancient oracle's *Know thyself*. "How can [the gods] meet us face to face," Orual finally asks, "till we have faces?"

As a story, as a fantasy, as a study in human psychology, as a grappling with spiritual dilemmas, above all as a work of art this book is magic.

Lewis' first novel of s.f.-cum-theology was the now classic OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET. Its equally impressive sequel, PERELANDRA (1944), is once more available (Avon, 35¢) and strongly recommended. Lewis has mentioned George Macdonald

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and David Lindsay as major influences on his work; but the great-grandparent (at least in English) of all fantasy narratives of theological purpose is John Bunyan's 1678-1684 THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, a book which has appealed, as imaginative fiction, even to readers of that Faith most abhorred by Bunyan, and which retains sufficient vitality to appear today in a newsstand edition (Pocket Library, 35¢).

Like other volumes in the Pocket Library, a sort of de luxe-prestige subdivision of Pocket Books, this commands the attention of the connoisseur of bookmaking. The designing and printing of these volumes far surpasses, in attractiveness and clarity, anything else I have seen from American publishers in the same price-range. In addition to such a welcome project as a one-play-per-volume Shakespeare, with the best arrangement of textual notes I have ever encountered, the series includes a visually delightful GULLIVER'S TRAVELS (35¢) and a "slightly abridged" (but still over 200,000 words!) ROBINSON CRUSOE (50¢)—the latter not strictly within our field but significant for its great influence upon early and even contemporary s.f.

Further spiritual fantasy appears in Johannes Rüber's BACH AND THE HEAVENLY CHOIR, translated by Maurice Michael (World, $3). Better described by its original German title, which may be rendered as THE CANONIZATION OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, this short novel tells of the future Pope Gregory XIX, gentle and musical, who tries to achieve formal recognition of the sainthood of the incomparable composer, partly to lead the faithful to a comprehension of the holiness of art, partly in the hope of drawing Lutherans back to Rome, but chiefly just because it is patently true that Bach *is* a saint. It's a charming notion, incompletely realized; Rüber does not trouble to explore the full dramatic and spiritual possibilities of the theme, and he is still a somewhat awkward and ineffective young novelist. But, as the London *Observer* has justly observed, "it has a gentleness that falls gratefully on the ear."

There is an unexpectedly strong spiritual element in Arthur C. Clarke's THE DEEP RANGE (Harcourt, Brace, $3.95)—a study of the effects on the conscience of the world when "Buddhism was now [*circa* 2050] the only religion that still possessed any real power over the minds of men"—but I fear that this is (to me, at least) one of the less convincing portions of a surprisingly uneven book.

Over the past decade Clarke has grown impressively not only as a writer of science fiction but as a novelist, to a point where his novels are frequently reviewed outside of the specialized-fiction ghettos and are bought by readers who know no other s.f. save possibly by Huxley and Bradbury. He has in the past succeeded, so admirably in welding

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science and the novel into a cohesive whole that it's hard to account for such a book as this, which is all extrapolation and adventure, devoid of character-development, character-interplay or, indeed, characters.

Where the book is good, however, it is very good indeed. Its topic, briefly stated by Clarke two years ago in a short story of the same name (in STAR S.F. STORIES NO. 3), is the future breeding of whales as a major portion of man's food supply; and intricate and fascinating are the problems of the Bureau of Whales of the World Food Organization. Clarke's experience in underwater exploration combines with his poetic powers to lend singular conviction, beauty and terror to his submarine incidents—which include a quest for the Great Sea Serpent and a magnificent battle with a giant squid.

Novelistically, THE FROZEN YEAR (Ballantine, $2.75; paper, 35¢) is James Blish's most successful work to date—so successful, indeed, that one wonders as to its precise category. The author himself classes his 5 other novels as "science fiction," but this one as a "contemporary novel." "Contemporary" is minutely imprecise, since the action takes place in 1958 and is related from the viewpoint of the 1960's; but whether any of the adventurous events have the beyond-contemporary-possibility quality demanded by s.f. is a question left deliberately unresolved.

Unarguably this is fiction of science, if possibly not science fiction; and Blish shows his expected skill in detailed research and in integration of scientific thought with story. As part of the International Geographic Year an expedition sets out for the North Pole, hopeful (among other objectives) of finding meteoritic evidence that the asteroids were once a single life-bearing planet. The scientific and technical problems of the expedition are absorbingly worked out; and its human tensions afford Blish an opportunity to examine a little of everything, from sexual fidelity to science-writing. If the results of examination are often less meaningful than the author hopes, the book is unflaggingly stimulating in its welcome effort to broaden the horizons of our field by —the closest I can come to a classification—trying to write a perfectly straight novel on a theme related to s.f.

Murray Leinster's CITY ON THE MOON (Avalon, $2.75) is firstrate in plausibly ingenious details of life on Luna, but hopelessly inadequate as fiction (and why is Leinster, creator of so many faultless short stories, usually unsatisfactory at novel-length?). . . . John Mantley's THE 27TH DAY (Dutton, $3.50) is unpardonable trash—writing and thinking are both on a level normally found in book form only in novelizations of film scripts.

The year's major disappointment to date is T. H. White's THE MASTER (Putnam's, $3.50). Offered and priced as an adult novel, this is noth-

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ing more than a pre-teen juvenile . . . and not a very good one. 156-year-old Mad Scientist's plans for electronic World Conquest foiled by 12-year-old twins and their little dog. There's a sinister "Chinaman," too, and a huge Negro whose tongue has been cut out . . . The science may be judged by the author's scorn for a picture-story in *Life* showing men on the moon "blowing themselves hither and thither with compressed air, regardless of the fact that there was no air to blow against." The tiny and remote island of Rockall in the North Atlantic is an attractive setting, and there are moments of agreeably written entertainment, somewhat suggestive of the quirky s.f. juveniles of John Keir Cross; but you won't find the least hint that this was written by the author of THE SWORD IN THE STONE and MISTRESS MASHAM'S REPOSE.

Among more honestly presented children's books, it's a pleasure to greet the return of Flyball in Ruthven Todd's SPACE CAT MEETS MARS (Scribner's, $2.25). This most self-assured of space-travelers discovers, in his third voyage, metallic mice (a frustrating find!) and a fire-engine red Marscat, who needs instruction on the enserfment of human beings. Published for the 6-to-10 group, the story should please every lover of cats, or of light deft humor.

UNDERSEA FLEET (Gnome, $2.75) is a teen-age story by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson, sequel to their 1954 UNDERSEA QUEST. Jim Eden, now reinstated as a cadet in the Sub-Sea Academy, is drawn from his duties into underwater guerilla warfare with amphibian mutants who ride domesticated plesiosaurs. It's all a little wilder and less plausibly detailed than the first book, but still fast exciting fun—and distinguished by a humanly credible Mad Scientist.

Literary agent Don Congdon, who represents an unfair proportion of the best imaginative writers, has assembled 20 tales by his clients and others as STORIES FOR THE DEAD OF NIGHT (Dell, 35¢); 6 of the stories are fantasies and all inhabit that same nightmare borderland as the Burnetts' recent 19 TALES OF TERROR. Most of the entries are not merely good but perfect: Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery,* Lord Dunsany's *The Two Bottles of Relish,* John Collier's *The Chaser,* Saki's *Sredni Vashtar* . . .

I think you begin to see the drawback. Anthologist Congden is a cannibalist of anthologies; and the book might well have been titled MOST FREQUENTLY REPRINTED TERROR TALES. But there is a small amount of unfamiliar material (particularly a fine Beaumont); and if you happen to have hitherto missed even one of the standard masterpieces, that single story will be worth the price.

Space considerations have kept crowding out a handful of last year's non-fiction books on Mars. The top entry was of course THE EXPLORATION OF MARS by Willy Ley and Wernher

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von Braun, illustrated by Chesley Bonestell (Viking, $4.95). I have some reservations on von Braun's contribution—chiefly that I wish the Herr Doktor would just once in a while say "This is how it might be" rather than asserting, with doctrinaire dogmatism, "This is how it *will* be." But Ley's account of the development of our knowledge of Mars is colorful and charming (in the hands of such a writer as Ley, the history of science can become even more fascinating than science itself); there's a splendid 5-page annotated bibliography of Martiana; and the Bonestell plates (some of which first appeared as F&SF covers) are magnificent.

EXPLORING MARS, text by Roy A. Gallant, pictures by Lowell Hess (Garden City, $2), like the same team's earlier EXPLORING THE MOON, goes beyond its expressed 8-to-14 level to satisfy adult novices with clear, accurate words and excellent illustrations—as good as you're apt to find outside of Bonestell's work. But one questions the use of the same title as R. S. Richardson's EXPLORING MARS (1955) and the odd resemblance of the jacket to Bonestell's painting for THE BEST FROM F&SF: THIRD SERIES (1954).

The Earl Nelson's THERE IS LIFE ON MARS (Citadel, $3) is a negligible entry. Conservative enough despite its sensational title (hardly speculating beyond the probability of lichen), it's unedited, unorganized and endlessly repetitious.

G. R. Balleine's PAST FINDING OUT (Macmillan, $3) is non-fiction of unusual interest to fantasy readers. Subtitled "The Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott and Her Successors," it tells of the strange cults of prophecy which have flourished within (if hardly with the approval of) the Church of England during the past century and a half—cults at once more startling in their concepts and more sincere in their beliefs than anything Southern California can offer. There are interesting hints of actual paranormal phenomena here, as well as a tribute to the unending inventiveness of man's imagination. The Reverend Mr. Balleine's treatment is at once detailed and compact, drily humorous and warmly understanding.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

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Master both of the hard facts of space and of its evocative mood fiction, Arthur C. Clarke here turns to yet a different and lighter vein, as he examines the impact upon cereal-sponsored Space Legions of a genuine craftsman.

Security Check

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT IN OUR AGE of assembly lines and mass production there's no room for the individual craftsman, the artist in wood or metal who made so many of the treasures of the past. Like most generalizations, this simply isn't true. He's rarer now, of course, but he's certainly not extinct. He has often had to change his vocation, but in his modest way he still flourishes. Even on the island of Manhattan he may be found, if you know where to look for him. Where rents are low and fire regulations unheard of, his minute, cluttered workshops may be discovered in the basements of apartment houses or in the upper stories of derelict shops. He may no longer make violins or cuckoo clocks or music boxes, but the skills he uses are the same as they always were, and no two objects he creates are ever identical. He is not contemptuous of mechanization: you will find several electric hand-tools under the debris on his bench. He has moved with the times: he will always be around, the universal odd-job-man who is never aware of it when he makes an immortal work of art.

Hans Muller's workshop consisted of a large room at the back of a deserted warehouse, no more than a vigorous stone's-throw from the Queensborough Bridge. Most of the building had been boarded up awaiting demolition, and sooner or later Hans would have to move. The only entrance was across a weed-covered yard used as a parking place during the day, and much frequented by the local juvenile delinquents at night. They had never given Hans any trouble, for he knew better than to cooperate with the police when they made their periodic enquiries. The police fully appreciated his delicate position and did not press matters, so Hans was on good terms with

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everybody. Being a peaceable citizen, that suited him very well.

The work on which Hans was now engaged would have deeply puzzled his Bavarian ancestors. Indeed, ten years ago it would have puzzled Hans himself. And it had all started because a bankrupt client had given him a TV set in payment for services rendered. . . .

Hans had accepted the offer reluctantly, not because he was old-fashioned and disapproved of TV, but simply because he couldn't imagine where he would find the time to look at the darned thing. Still, he thought, at least I can always sell it for fifty dollars. But before I do that, let's see what the programs are like. . . .

His hand had gone out to the switch: the screen had filled with moving shapes—and, like millions of men before him, Hans was lost. He entered a world he had not known existed, a world of battling spaceships, of exotic planets and strange races—the world, in fact, of Captain Zipp, Commander of the Space Legion.

Only when the tedious recital of the virtues of Crunche, the Wonder Cereal, had given way to an almost equally tedious boxing match between two muscle-bound characters who seemed to have signed a non-agression pact did the magic fade. Hans was a simple man. He had always been fond of fairy tales—and *this* was the modern fairy tale, with trimmings of which the Grimm Brothers had never dreamed. So Hans did not sell his TV set.

It was some weeks before the initial naive, uncritical enjoyment wore off. The first thing that began to annoy Hans was the furniture and general décor in the world of the future. He was, as has been indicated, an artist; and he refused to believe that in a hundred years taste would have deteriorated as badly as the sponsors of Crunche seemed to imagine.

He also thought very little of the weapons that Captain Zipp and his opponents used. It was true that Hans did not pretend to understand the principles upon which the Portable Proton Disintegrator was based, but however it worked, there was certainly no reason why it should be *that* clumsy. The clothes, the spaceship interiors—they just weren't convincing. How did he know? He had always possessed a highly developed sense of the fitness of things, and it could still operate even in this novel field.

We have said that Hans was a simple man. He was also a shrewd one, and he had heard that there was money in TV. So he sat down and began to draw.

Even if the producer of Captain Zipp had not lost patience with his set designer, Hans Muller's ideas would certainly have made him sit up and take notice. There was an authenticity and realism

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about them that made them quite outstanding. They were completely free from the element of phoniness that had begun to upset even Captain Zipp's most juvenile followers. Hans was hired on the spot.

He made his own conditions, however. What he was doing he did largely for love, notwithstanding the fact that it was earning him more money than anything he had ever done before in his life. He would take no assistants, and would remain in his little workshop. All that he wanted to do was to produce the prototypes, the basic designs. The mass production could be done somewhere else; he was a craftsman, not a factory.

The arrangement had worked well. Over the last six months Captain Zipp had been transformed and was now the despair of all the rival space-operas. This, his viewers thought, was not just a serial about the future. It *was* the future—there was no argument about it. Even the actors seemed to have been inspired by their new surroundings: off the set, they sometimes behaved like Twentieth Century time travelers stranded in the Victorian Age, indignant because they no longer had access to the gadgets that had always been part of their lives.

But Hans knew nothing about this. He toiled happily away, refusing to see anyone except the producer, doing all his business over the telephone—and watching the final result to ensure that his ideas had not been mutilated. The only sign of his connection with the slightly fantastic world of commercial TV was a crate of Crunche in one corner of the workshop. He had sampled one mouthful of this present from his grateful sponsor and had then remembered thankfully that, after all, he was not paid to eat the stuff.

He was working late one Sunday evening, putting the final touches to a new design of space helmet, when he suddenly realized that he was no longer alone. Slowly he turned from the workbench and faced the door. It had been locked—how could it have been opened so silently? There were two men standing beside it, motionless, watching him. Hans felt his heart trying to climb into his gullet, and summoned up what courage he could to challenge them. At least, he felt thankfully, he had little money here. Then he wondered if, after all, this was a good thing. They might be annoyed. . . .

"Who are you?" he asked. "What are you doing here?"

One of the men moved towards him while the other remained watching alertly from the door. They were both wearing very new overcoats, with hats low down on their heads so that Hans could not see their faces. They were too well dressed, he decided, to be crooks.

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"There's no need to be alarmed, Mr. Muller," replied the nearer man, reading his thoughts without difficulty. "This isn't a hold-up. It's official. We're from . . . Security."

"I don't understand."

The other reached into a portfolio he had been carrying beneath his coat, and pulled out a sheaf of photographs.

"You've given us quite a headache, Mr. Muller. It's taken us two weeks to find you—your employers were so secretive. No doubt they were anxious to hide you from their rivals. However, here we are and I'd like you to answer some questions."

"I'm not a spy!" answered Hans indignantly as the meaning of the words penetrated. "You can't do this! I'm a loyal American citizen!"

The other ignored the outburst. He handed over a photograph. "Do you recognise this?" he said.

"Yes. It's the inside of Captain Zipp's spaceship."

"And you designed it?"

"Yes."

Another photograph came out of the file. "And what about this?"

"That's the Martian city of Paldar, as seen from the air."

"And *this?*"

"Oh, the Proton Gun. I was quite proud of that."

"Tell me, Mr. Muller—are these all your own ideas?"

"Yes, *I* don't steal from other people."

His questioner turned to his companion and spoke for a few minutes in a voice too low for Hans to hear.

"I'm sorry," continued the intruder. "But there has been a serious leak. It may be—uh—accidental, even unconscious, but that does not affect the issue. Please come with us."

There was such power and authority in the stranger's voice that Hans began to climb into his overcoat without a murmur. Somehow, he no longer doubted his visitors' credentials and never thought of asking for any proof. He was worried, but not yet seriously alarmed. Of course, it was obvious what had happened. He remembered hearing about a science fiction writer during the war who had described the atom bomb with disconcerting accuracy. When so much secret research was going on, such accidents were bound to occur. He wondered just what it was he had given away.

At the doorway, he looked back into his workshop.

"It's all a ridiculous mistake," he said. "If I *did* show anything secret in the program, it was just a coincidence. I've never done anything to annoy the FBI."

It was then that the second man spoke at last, in very bad English and with a most peculiar accent.

"What is the FBI?" he asked.

But Hans didn't hear him. He had just seen the spaceship.

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Here is a Challenge-to-the-Reader story, a stimulating puzzle for you to solve: How could you prove to a wholly alien life-form that you are a rational being? To the survivors of the wrecked spaceship Lode Star *it was a challenge of a more vital sort—a riddle of life or death. I doubt if any reader will soon forget Mr. Chandler's pointed answer.*

The Cage

by BERTRAM CHANDLER

IMPRISONMENT IS ALWAYS A HUMILiating experience, no matter how philosophical the prisoner. Imprisonment by one's own kind is bad enough—but one can, at least, talk to one's captors, one can make one's wants understood; one can, on occasion, appeal to them man to man.

Imprisonment is doubly humiliating when one's captors, in all honesty, treat one as a lower animal.

The party from the survey ship could, perhaps, be excused for failing to recognize the survivors from the interstellar liner *Lode Star* as rational beings. At least two hundred days had passed since their landing on the planet without a name—an unintentional landing made when *Lode Star's* Erenhaft generators, driven far in excess of their normal capacity by a breakdown of the electronic regulator, had flung her far from the regular shipping lanes to an unexplored region of Space. *Lode Star* had landed safely enough; but shortly thereafter (troubles never come singly) her Pile had got out of control and her Captain had ordered his First Mate to evacuate the passengers and such crew members not needed to cope with the emergency, and to get them as far from the ship as possible.

Hawkins and his charges were well clear when there was a flare of released energy, a not very violent explosion. The survivors wanted to turn to watch, but Hawkins drove them on with curses and, at times, blows. Luckily they were up wind from the ship and so escaped the fall-out.

When the fireworks seemed to be over Hawkins, accompanied by Dr. Boyle, the ship's surgeon, returned to the scene of the disaster. The two men, wary of radioactivity, were

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cautious and stayed a safe distance from the shallow, still smoking crater that marked where the ship had been. It was all too obvious to them that the Captain, together with his officers and technicians, was now no more than an infinitesimal part of the incandescent cloud that had mushroomed up into the low overcast.

Thereafter the fifty-odd men and women, the survivors of *Lode Star,* had degenerated. It hadn't been a fast process—Hawkins and Boyle, aided by a committee of the more responsible passengers, had fought a stout rearguard action. But it had been a hopeless sort of fight. The climate was against them, for a start. Hot it was, always in the neighborhood of 85° Fahrenheit. And it was wet—a thin, warm drizzle falling all the time. The air seemed to abound with the spores of fungi—luckily these did not attack living skin but throve on dead organic matter, on clothing. They throve to an only slightly lesser degree on metals and on the synthetic fabrics that many of the castaways wore.

Danger, outside danger, would have helped to maintain morale. But there were no dangerous animals. There were only little smooth-skinned things, not unlike frogs, that hopped through the sodden undergrowth, and, in the numerous rivers, fishlike creatures ranging in size from the shark to the tadpole, and all of them possessing the bellicosity of the latter.

Food had been no problem after the first few hungry hours. Volunteers had tried a large, succulent fungus growing on the boles of the huge fern-like trees. They had pronounced it good. After a lapse of five hours they had neither died nor even complained of abdominal pains. That fungus was to become the staple diet of the castaways. In the weeks that followed other fungi had been found, and berries, and roots—all of them edible. They provided a welcome variety.

Fire—in spite of the all-pervading heat—was the blessing most missed by the castaways. With it they could have supplemented their diet by catching and cooking the little frog-things of the rain forest, the fishes of the streams. Some of the hardier spirits did eat these animals raw, but they were frowned upon by most of the other members of the community. Too, fire would have helped to drive back the darkness of the long nights, would, by its real warmth and light, have dispelled the illusion of cold produced by the ceaseless dripping of water from every leaf and frond.

When they fled from the ship most of the survivors had possessed pocket lighters—but the lighters had been lost when the pockets, together with the clothing surrounding them, had disintegrated. In any case, all attempts to start a fire in the days when there were still pocket lighters had failed—there was not, Hawkins swore, a single dry spot on the

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whole accursed planet. Now the making of fire was quite impossible: even if there had been present an expert on the rubbing together of two dry sticks he could have found no material with which to work.

They made their permanent settlement on the crest of a low hill. (There were, so far as they could discover, no mountains.) It was less thickly wooded there than the surrounding plains, and the ground was less marshy underfoot. They succeeded in wrenching fronds from the fern-like trees and built for themselves crude shelters—more for the sake of privacy than for any comfort that they afforded. They clung, with a certain desperation, to the governmental forms of the worlds that they had left, and elected themselves a council. Boyle, the ship's surgeon, was their chief. Hawkins, rather to his surprise, was returned as a council member by a majority of only two votes—on thinking it over he realized that many of the passengers must still bear a grudge against the ship's executive staff for their present predicament.

The first council meeting was held in a hut—if so it could be called—especially constructed for the purpose. The council members squatted in a rough circle. Boyle, the president, got slowly to his feet. Hawkins grinned wryly as he compared the surgeon's nudity with the pomposity that he seemed to have assumed with his elected rank, as he compared the man's dignity with the unkempt appearance presented by his uncut, uncombed gray hair, his uncombed and straggling gray beard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Boyle.

Hawkins looked around him at the naked, pallid bodies, at the stringy, lusterless hair, the long, dirty fingernails of the men and the unpainted lips of the women. He thought, I don't suppose I look much like an officer and a gentleman myself.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Boyle. "We have been, as you know, elected to represent the human community upon this planet. I suggest that at this, our first meeting, we discuss our chances of survival—not as individuals, but as a race—"

"I'd like to ask Mr. Hawkins what our chances are of being picked up," shouted one of the two women members, a dried-up, spinsterish creature with prominent ribs and vertebrae.

"Slim," said Hawkins. "As you know, no communication is possible with other ships, or with planet stations when the Interstellar Drive is operating. When we snapped out of the Drive and came in for our landing we sent out a distress call—but we couldn't say where we were. Furthermore, we don't know that the call was received—"

"Miss Taylor," said Boyle huffily. "Mr. Hawkins. I would remind you that I am the duly elected president of this council. There will be time for a general discussion later.

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"As most of you may already have assumed, the age of this planet, biologically speaking, corresponds roughly with that of Earth during the Carboniferous Era. As we already know, no species yet exists to challenge our supremacy. By the time such a species does emerge—something analogous to the giant lizards of Earth's Triassic Era—we should be well established—"

"*We* shall be dead!" called one of the men.

"*We* shall be dead," agreed the doctor, "but our descendants will be very much alive. We have to decide how to give them as good a start as possible. Language we shall bequeath to them—"

"Never mind the language, Doc," called the other woman member. She was a small blonde, slim, with a hard face. "It's just this question of descendants that I'm here to look after. I represent the women of childbearing age—there are, as you must know, fifteen of us here. So far the girls have been very, very careful. We have reason to be. Can you, as a medical man, guarantee—bearing in mind that you have no drugs, no instruments—safe deliveries? Can you guarantee that our children will have a good chance of survival?"

Boyle dropped his pomposity like a worn-out garment.

"I'll be frank," he said. "I have not, as you, Miss Hart, have pointed out, either drugs or instruments. But I can assure you, Miss Hart, that your chances of a safe delivery are far better than they would have been on Earth during, say, the Eighteenth Century. And I'll tell you why. On this planet, so far as we know (and we have been here long enough now to find out the hard way), there exist no microorganisms harmful to Man. Did such organisms exist, the bodies of those of us still surviving would be, by this time, mere masses of suppuration. Most of us, of course, would have died of septicemia long ago. And that, I think, answers *both* your questions."

"I haven't finished yet," she said. "Here's another point. There are fifty-three of us here, men and women. There are ten married couples—so we'll count them out. That leaves thirty-three people, of whom twenty are men. Twenty men to thirteen (aren't we girls always unlucky?) women. All of us aren't young—but we're all of us women. What sort of marriage set-up do we have? Monogamy? Polyandry?"

"Monogamy, of course," said a tall, thin man sharply. He was the only one of those present who wore clothing—if so it could be called. The disintegrating fronds lashed around his waist with a strand of vine did little to serve any useful purpose.

"All right, then," said the girl. "Monogamy. I'd rather prefer it that way myself. But I warn you that if that's the way we play it there's going to be trouble. And in any murder involving passion and jealousy the woman is as liable to be a victim

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as either of the men—and I don't want *that*."

"What do you propose, then, Miss Hart?" asked Boyle.

"Just this, Doc. When it comes to our matings we leave love out of it. If two men want to marry the same woman, then let them fight it out. The best man gets the girl—and keeps her."

"Natural selection . . ." murmured the surgeon. "I'm in favor—but we must put it to the vote."

At the crest of the low hill was a shallow depression, a natural arena. Round the rim sat the castaways—all but four of them. One of the four was Doctor Boyle—he had discovered that his duties as president embraced those of a referee; it had been held that he was best competent to judge when one of the contestants was liable to suffer permanent damage. Another of the four was the girl Mary Hart. She had found a serrated twig with which to comb her long hair, she had contrived a wreath of yellow flowers with which to crown the victor. Was it, wondered Hawkins as he sat with the other council members, a hankering after an Earthly wedding ceremony, or was it a harking back to something older and darker?

"A pity that these blasted molds got our watches," said the fat man on Hawkins' right. "If we had any means of telling the time we could have rounds, make a proper prize-fight of it."

Hawkins nodded. He looked at the four in the centre of the arena—at the strutting, barbaric woman, at the pompous old man, at the two dark-bearded young men with their glistening white bodies. He knew them both—Fennet had been a Senior Cadet of the ill fated *Lode Star;* Clemens, at least seven years Fennet's senior, was a passenger, had been a prospector on the frontier worlds.

"If we had anything to bet with," said the fat man happily, "I'd lay it on Clemens. That cadet of yours hasn't a snowball's chance in hell. He's been brought up to fight clean—Clemens has been brought up to fight dirty."

"Fennet's in better condition," said Hawkins. "He's been taking exercise, while Clemens has just been lying around sleeping and eating. Look at the paunch on him!"

"There's nothing wrong with good, healthy flesh and muscle," said the fat man, patting his own paunch.

"No gouging, no biting!" called the doctor. "And may the best man win!"

He stepped back smartly away from the contestants, stood with the Hart woman.

There was an air of embarrassment about the pair of them as they stood there, each with his fists hanging at his sides. Each seemed to be regretting that matters had come to such a pass.

"Go *on!*" screamed Mary Hart at last. "Don't you want me? You'll

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live to a ripe old age here—and it'll be lonely with no woman!"

"They can always wait around until your daughters grow up, Mary!" shouted one of her friends.

"If I ever have any daughters!" she called. "I shan't at this rate!"

"Go on!" shouted the crowd. "Go on!"

Fennet made a start. He stepped forward almost diffidently, dabbed with his right fist at Clemens' unprotected face. It wasn't a hard blow, but it must have been painful. Clemens put his hand up to his nose, brought it away and stared at the bright blood staining it. He growled, lumbered forward with arms open to hug and crush. The cadet danced back, scoring twice more with his right.

"Why doesn't he *hit* him?" demanded the fat man.

"And break every bone in his fist? They aren't wearing gloves, you know," said Hawkins.

Fennet decided to make a stand. He stood firm, his feet slightly apart, and brought his right into play once more. This time he left his opponent's face alone, went for his belly instead. Hawkins was surprised to see that the prospector was taking the blows with apparent equanimity —he must be, he decided, much tougher in actuality than in appearance.

The cadet sidestepped smartly . . . and slipped on the wet grass. Clemens fell heavily on to his opponent; Hawkins could hear the *whoosh* as the air was forced from the lad's lungs. The prospector's thick arms encircled Fennet's body —and Fennet's knee came up viciously to Clemens' groin. The prospector squealed, but hung on grimly. One of his hands was around Fennet's throat now, and the other one, its fingers viciously hooked, was clawing for the cadet's eyes.

"No gouging!" Boyle was screaming. "No gouging!"

He dropped down to his knees, caught Clemens' thick wrist with both his hands.

Something made Hawkins look up then. It may have been a sound, although this is doubtful; the spectators were behaving like boxing fans at a prizefight. They could hardly be blamed—this was the first piece of real excitement that had come their way since the loss of the ship. It may have been a sound that made Hawkins look up, it may have been the sixth sense possessed by all good spacemen. What he saw made him cry out.

Hovering above the arena was a helicopter. There was something about the design of it, a subtle oddness, that told Hawkins that this was no Earthly machine. Suddenly, from its smooth, shining belly, dropped a net, seemingly of dull metal. It enveloped the struggling figures on the ground, trapped the doctor and Mary Hart.

Hawkins shouted again—a wordless cry. He jumped to his feet, ran to the assistance of his ensnared com-

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panions. The net seemed to be alive. It twisted itself around his wrists, bound his ankles. Others of the castaways rushed to aid Hawkins.

"Keep away!" he shouted. "Scatter!"

The low drone of the helicopter's rotors rose in pitch. The machine lifted. In an incredibly short space of time the arena was to the First Mate's eyes no more than a pale green saucer in which little white ants scurried aimlessly. Then the flying machine was above and through the base of the low clouds, and there was nothing to be seen but drifting whiteness.

When, at last, it made its descent Hawkins was not surprised to see the silvery tower of a great spaceship standing among the low trees on a level plateau.

The world to which they were taken would have been a marked improvement on the world they had left had it not been for the mistaken kindness of their captors. The cage in which the three men were housed duplicated, with remarkable fidelity, the climatic conditions of the planet upon which *Lode Star* had been lost. It was glassed in, and from sprinklers in its roof fell a steady drizzle of warm water. A couple of dispirited tree ferns provided little shelter from the depressing precipitation. Twice a day a hatch at the back of the cage, which was made of a sort of concrete, opened, and slabs of a fungus remarkably similar to that on which they had been subsisting were thrown in. There was a hole in the floor of the cage; this the prisoners rightly assumed was for sanitary purposes.

On either side of them were other cages. In one of them was Mary Hart—alone. She could gesture to them, wave to them, and that was all. The cage on the other side held a beast built on the same general lines as a lobster, but with a strong hint of squid. Across the broad roadway they could see other cages, but could not see what they housed.

Hawkins, Boyle and Fennet sat on the damp floor and stared through the thick glass and the bars at the beings outside who stared at them.

"If only they were humanoid," sighed the doctor. "If only they were the same shape as we are we might make a start towards convincing them that we, too, are intelligent beings."

"They aren't the same shape," said Hawkins. "And we, were the situations reversed, would take some convincing that three six-legged beer barrels were men and brothers. . . . Try Pythagoras' Theorem again," he said to the cadet.

Without enthusiasm the youth broke fronds from the nearest tree fern. He broke them into smaller pieces, then on the mossy floor laid them out in the design of a right-angled triangle with squares constructed on all three sides. The natives—a large one, one slightly smaller and a little one—regarded him in-

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curiously with their flat, dull eyes. The large one put the tip of a tentacle into a pocket—the things wore clothing—and pulled out a brightly colored packet, handed it to the little one. The little one tore off the wrapping, started stuffing pieces of some bright blue confection into the slot on its upper side that, obviously, served it as a mouth.

"I wish they were allowed to feed the animals," sighed Hawkins. "I'm sick of that damned fungus."

"Let's recapitulate," said the doctor. "After all, we've nothing else to do. We were taken from our camp by the helicopter—six of us. We were taken to the survey ship—a vessel that seemed in no way superior to our own interstellar ships. You assure us, Hawkins, that the ship used the Ehrenhaft Drive or something so near to it as to be its twin brother. . . ."

"Correct," agreed Hawkins.

"On the ship we're kept in separate cages. There's no ill treatment, we're fed and watered at frequent intervals. We land on this strange planet, but we see nothing of it. We're hustled out of cages like so many cattle into a covered van. We know that we're being driven *somewhere,* that's all. The van stops, the door opens and a couple of these animated beer barrels poke in poles with smaller editions of those fancy nets on the end of them. They catch Clemens and Miss Taylor, drag them out. We never see them again. The rest of us spend the night and the following day and night in individual cages. The next day we're taken to this . . . zoo . . ."

"Do you think they were vivisected?" asked Fennet. "I never liked Clemens, but . . ."

"I'm afraid they were," said Boyle. "Our captors must have learned of the difference between the sexes by it. Unluckily there's no way of determining intelligence by vivisection—"

"The filthy brutes!" shouted the cadet.

"Easy, son," counseled Hawkins. "You can't blame them, you know. We've vivisected animals a lot more like us than we are to these things."

"The problem," the doctor went on, "is to convince these things—as you call them, Hawkins—that we are rational beings like themselves. How would they define a rational being? How would *we* define a rational being?"

"Somebody who knows Pythagoras' Theorem," said the cadet sulkily.

"I read somewhere," said Hawkins, "that the history of Man is the history of the fire-making, tool-using animal . . ."

"Then make fire," suggested the doctor. "Make us some tools, and use them."

"Don't be silly. You know that there's not an artifact among the bunch of us. No false teeth even—not even a metal filling. Even so . . ." He paused. "When I was a youngster there was, among the ca-

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dets in the interstellar ships, a revival of the old arts and crafts. We considered ourselves in a direct line of descent from the old windjammer sailormen, so we learned how to splice rope and wire, how to make sennit and fancy knots and all the rest of it. Then one of us hit on the idea of basketmaking. We were in a passenger ship, and we used to make our baskets secretly, daub them with violent colors and then sell them to passengers as genuine souvenirs from the Lost Planet of Arcturus VI. There was a most distressing scene when the Old Man and the Mate found out. . . ."

"What are you driving at?" asked the doctor.

"Just this. We will demonstrate our manual dexterity by the weaving of baskets—I'll teach you how."

"It might work. . . ." said Boyle slowly. "It might just work. . . . On the other hand, don't forget that certain birds and animals do the same sort of thing. On Earth there's the beaver, who builds quite cunning dams. There's the bower bird, who makes a bower for his mate as part of the courtship ritual . . ."

The Head Keeper must have known of creatures whose courting habits resembled those of the Terran bower bird. After three days of feverish basketmaking, which consumed all the bedding and stripped the tree ferns, Mary Hart was taken from her cage and put in with the three men. After she had got over her hysterical pleasure at having somebody to talk to again she was rather indignant.

It was good, thought Hawkins drowsily, to have Mary with them. A few more days of solitary confinement must surely have driven the girl crazy. Even so, having Mary in the same cage had its drawbacks. He had to keep a watchful eye on young Fennet. He even had to keep a watchful eye on Boyle—the old goat!

Mary screamed.

Hawkins jerked into complete wakefulness. He could see the pale form of Mary—on this world it was never completely dark at night—and, on the other side of the cage, the forms of Fennet and Boyle. He got hastily to his feet, stumbled to the girl's side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I . . . I don't know. . . . Something small, with sharp claws . . . It ran over me. . . ."

"Oh," said Hawkins, "that was only Joe."

"*Joe?*" she demanded.

"I don't know exactly what he—or she—is," said the man.

"I think he's definitely *he*," said the doctor.

"What is Joe?" she asked again.

"He must be the local equivalent to a mouse," said the doctor, "although he looks nothing like one. He comes up through the floor somewhere to look for scraps of food. We're trying to tame him—"

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"You encourage the brute?" she screamed. "I demand that you do something about him—at once! Poison him, or trap him. Now!"

"Tomorrow," said Hawkins.

"Now!" she screamed.

"Tomorrow," said Hawkins firmly.

The capture of Joe proved to be easy. Two flat baskets, hinged like the valves of an oyster shell, made the trap. There was bait inside—a large piece of the fungus. There was a cunningly arranged upright that would fall at the least tug at the bait. Hawkins, lying sleepless on his damp bed, heard the tiny click and thud that told him that the trap had been sprung. He heard Joe's indignant chitterings, heard the tiny claws scrabbling at the stout basketwork.

Mary Hart was asleep. He shook her.

"We've caught him," he said.

"Then kill him," she answered drowsily.

But Joe was not killed. The three men were rather attached to him. With the coming of daylight they transferred him to a cage that Hawkins had fashioned. Even the girl relented when she saw the harmless ball of multi-colored fur bouncing indignantly up and down in its prison. She insisted on feeding the little animal, exclaimed gleefully when the thin tentacles reached out and took the fragment of fungus from her fingers.

For three days they made much of their pet. On the fourth day beings whom they took to be keepers entered the cage with their nets, immobilized the occupants, and carried off Joe and Hawkins.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," Boyle said. "He's gone the same way . . ."

"They'll have him stuffed and mounted in some museum," said Fennet glumly.

"No," said the girl. "They couldn't!"

"They could," said the doctor.

Abruptly the hatch at the back of the cage opened.

Before the three humans could retreat to the scant protection supplied by a corner a voice called, "It's all right, come on out!"

Hawkins walked into the cage. He was shaved, and the beginnings of a healthy tan had darkened the pallor of his skin. He was wearing a pair of trunks fashioned from some bright red material.

"Come on out," he said again. "Our hosts have apologized very sincerely, and they have more suitable accommodation prepared for us. Then, as soon as they have a ship ready, we're to go to pick up the other survivors."

"Not so fast," said Boyle. "Put us in the picture, will you? What made them realize that we were rational beings?"

Hawkins' face darkened.

"Only rational beings," he said, "put other beings in cages."

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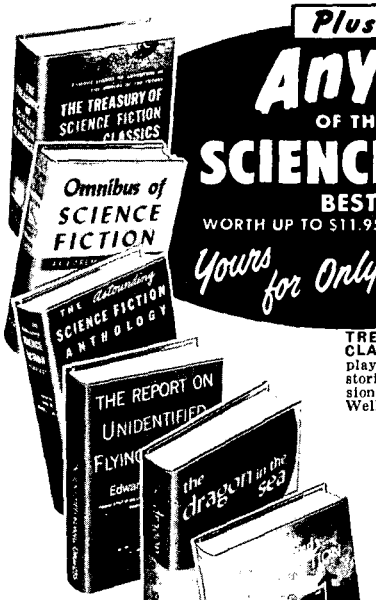
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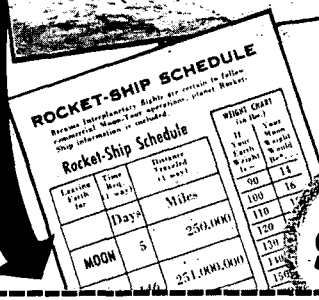

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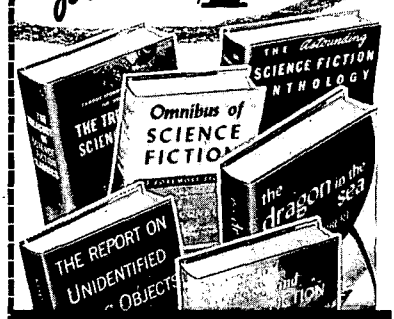
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